



The Persepolis Ritual

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James M. Fennelly

The stone figures which flank the doorways, stairways, and halls of Persepolis are mute witnesses to an ancient ritual which took place at this city of Persian kings. The ruins of the once glorious city are now brought to life through a careful examination of what they reveal and a comparison with ceremonies better known from ancient Babylonia.

Sunset, the beginning of a new day, is the time to view the ruins of Persepolis. When the direct rays of the sun have subsided, sculptural detail emerges from obscurity, and the figures resume a liveliness lost in the glare. It is also pleasant to visit Persepolis at dawn, but the mountain to the east, out of which the stone terrace-platform has been cut, blots out the early sunlight, allowing only later morning rays to strike the carvings. But at sunset the stones reflect the golden hue of the evening sky, and Persepolis takes on anew its ancient splendor. What is the story these stones tell? What mystery do the carved figures hide? Perhaps new light refracted from Babylon may at last unlock their secret and so illuminate the religious and political self-understanding of those Persian kings who set them there.

This ancient ceremonial city of Persian emperors is now a national Iranian shrine, located ca. 50 km north of Shiraz, on the northern edge of a large fertile plain in southwest Iran. Darius the Great, who reigned from 522 to 486 B.C., began its construction around 512 B.C., and his heirs continued the construction and elaborated on the plan until the fall of the empire to Alexander in 330 B.C. The primary building, however, took place in the years 503-497 B.C.

Persepolis now consists of the 32.7-acre stone terrace-platform which bears the ruins of a dozen ceremonial buildings and a massive gateway. The platform itself is ca. 500 m long and stands, on an average, 20 m

above the level of the Marv Dhasht plain. At its northwest corner a double reversing set of 111 steps, 7 m wide with short, 10-cm risers, leads gently to the sacred area. Tool marks and clay tablets reveal the identity of the Persian masons and skilled craftsmen from Sardis, Greece, and Egypt—hired men rather than slaves, who executed the stone work of the platform.

The original design for Persepolis required a massive Gate of All Peoples to stand at the top of the double staircase. Darius' plan called for two pairs of Persian sphinxes on this gateway, one pair facing east toward the mountain and sunrise, the other west toward the sunset. Although the construction of the gateway was actually completed by Darius' son Xerxes, who reigned 486-465 B.C., it may be safely assumed that a portion of the gate, perhaps composed only of wood and mudbrick, stood at the top of the staircase from the very beginning.

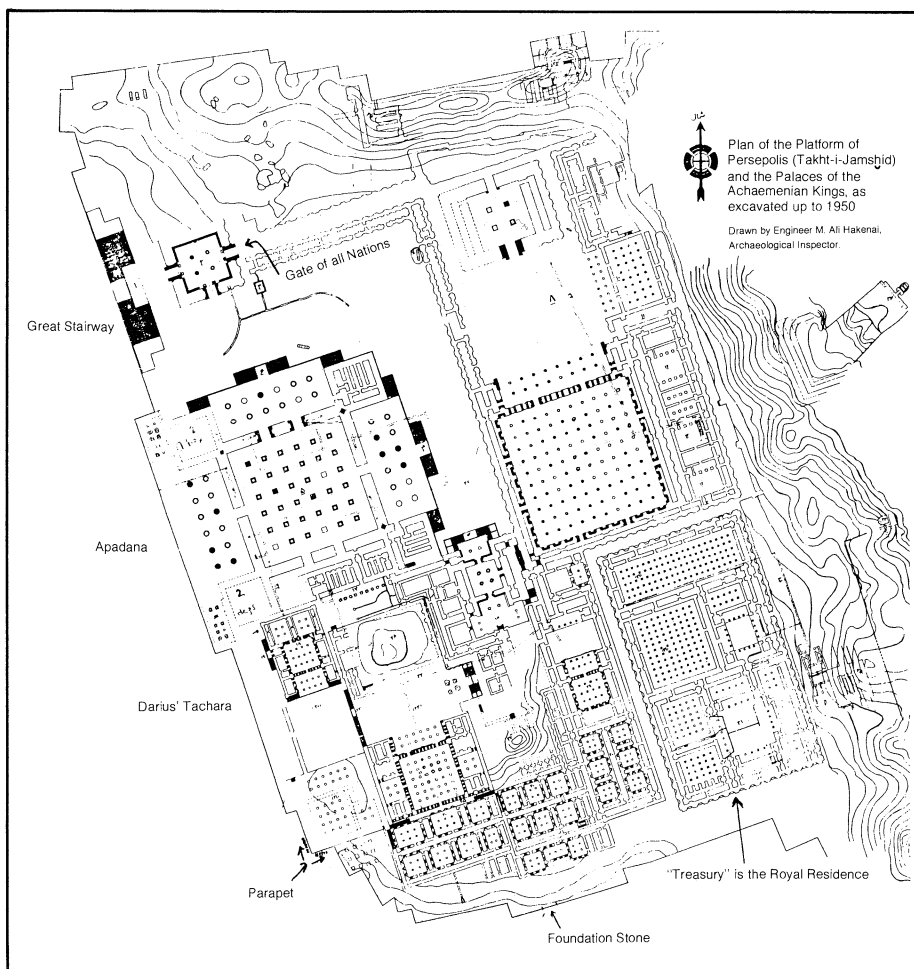
On the Terrace

The stone terrace which dominates present-day Persepolis was but the base, the foundation, for the royal city's buildings which were constructed thereupon by Darius and his descendants over some 60 years. Darius' Apadana (assembly hall), his palace (the *tachara*), the palaces of Xerxes and Artaxerxes I, the "treasury building," and the Tripylon are the most important of these. Sculptured reliefs decorate the sides of the staircases and doors in the various buildings.

The Apadana, a festival banquet hall, is the largest of the Persepolis buildings. Begun by Darius and completed by Xerxes, it is within and to the right of the Gate of All Peoples. A large stone ablution tank stands a few feet south of the gate in the northeastern Apadana courtyard. The Apadana itself has a base about 60 m square; its foundation rises about 2.6 m above the courtyard.

Beardless attendant with cosmetic bottle and towel. South jamb, west doorway of Room 12 of the Palace of Darius. *OIP* 68, pl. 149; courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. The figure captions represent the traditional interpretation of the uses of the buildings, which this article attempts to reevaluate.





Four sets of stairs, two on the north and two on the east, lead into the building. The two northern stairs are flanked by carved figures of Medes and Persians in ceremonial attire. Elaborate processional scenes featuring Persia's 27 tributary nations decorate the two eastern flights. Here Medes with their bulbous hats and baggy pants beside Persians in long pleated robes and flat-topped round hats lead an ordered world up into the Apadana for the festival of the New Year, which begins with sunset on the evening of the first new moon following the spring equinox.

On the western edge of the platform, just south of the Apadana and 2 m above its level, stands the Palace of Darius, the *tachara*. It is the best preserved of the buildings in use during the Seleucid era, and Xerxes, Artaxerxes I, and Artaxerxes III all did extensive reconstruction on the palace itself and on its courtyard. A small double staircase on its west side, added by

Artaxerxes I, who reigned 465-423 B.C., remains *in situ*. Two main staircases rise on the south, reconstructed along with the south porch of Xerxes. The courtyard of the palace was also extensively renovated both by Artaxerxes I and Artaxerxes III, who reigned 359-338 B.C. Giuseppe Tilia has discovered that this courtyard had an unusual parapet atop the terrace wall. A reservoir, a sacred well, and a complex drainage system are connected to the *tachara*.

The extensive renovations done to this building by the kings following Darius suggest that it was of special importance to this dynasty; so also do its several unique characteristics. The first permanent structure erected on the terrace, it stands at the highest elevation of the site. It is the only building to have a southern courtyard, opening to the south-southeast. The palace itself also opens to the west, with a full view of the plain below. Numerous relief sculptures carved on

the main processional doors show the king leaving, never entering, the palace. The name of Xerxes is cut into the robe of Darius on one of these processional door carvings. Each of the 14 windows of the palace bears a trilingual inscription in Elamite, Old Persian, and Babylonian. The palaces of Xerxes (formerly identified as a harem by E. Schmidt [1953: 257]) and of Artaxerxes I face the *tachara*.

Another key structure, the so-called treasury building, lies south and to the east of the other buildings. Gerd Gropp has shown that this was in fact the king's residential palace. In this building Schmidt discovered the two famous carvings of Darius and Xerxes giving audience to a Mede, although Tilia has shown conclusively that they were originally the central scene of the Apadana staircase and were moved to the residential hall or treasury during the reign of Artaxerxes III.

The last of the six structures which form the essential Persepolis is the Triplyon, frequently called the Central Palace. Darius began its construction, and Xerxes completed it. Human-faced, bull-headed columns (one of which is now in the University of Chicago Museum) dominate the remains. This Triplyon has three processional doors, one of which shows King Darius enthroned and carried toward the east.

Other buildings also remain at Persepolis, among them the Xerxes *hadish*, the Hall of the Hundred Columns, the "Harem," and the unfinished gate, but these are simply later elaborations on a central theme. The six primary structures form the essential Persepolis.

What took place at Persepolis? What ritual unfolded on this imposing platform? Many scholars, stirred by the massive remains, have attempted to recreate that ritual, to understand the mystery, but through the ages the carefully carved figures preserve their ancient secret.

A Babylonian Clue: The New Year's Festival

A set of clay tablets describing a Babylonian New Year's festival ritual may help today's inquirers to unlock the secret of Persepolis. These tablets, first published in 1921 under the title *The Temple Program for the New*

Year's Festivals at Babylon (cf. Pritchard 1955: 331-38), describe prayers and priestly duties for portions of several ritual days during the Babylonian New Year's celebration. This festival took place in the month of Nisan (March-April). Numerous priests and a king, or some figure representing the king, performed the sacred drama on the Euphrates River at Babylon during the late Babylonian era and on into the Seleucid period (312-264 B.C.). Scholars agree that although these tablets were copied during the Seleucid era (ca. 300 B.C.), they accurately reflect an older, pre-Achemenid, Babylonian ritual. The continuing existence and use of the ritual into the Seleucid period explains this late copy.

The tablets delineate four categories of priests who carry out the Babylonian ritual:

a) The high priest (the *urigallu*) presides over the central cult action. His instructions predominate in the tablets.

b) The *eribbiti* execute the rituals of the temple daily throughout the year. They have access to all parts of the shrine and often assist the high priest and the king during the New Year ceremonies.

c) The *kalu* are exorcists and musicians with a limited and carefully circumscribed set of duties. Their responsibilities are described on other tablets.

d) The *masmasu* is an incantationist who drives off evil spirits with a kettledrum and a censer. He normally performs his rites in the houses and courtyards of the afflicted, but at the New Year, assisted by a slaughterer priest, he purifies the buildings before the primary ritual begins. Although he is permitted to cleanse the shrine of Nabu, he must remain in the courtyard of the temple and may not enter the private chambers of the god and goddess.

The ritual drama for the Babylonian New Year's Festival took place over 12 days, but the tablets as preserved contain ritual instructions for only 4 of these 12 days; the ritual for Days 1 and 6-12 are missing. The instructions for Days 2-5, however, provide sufficient information to permit with the aid of other sources

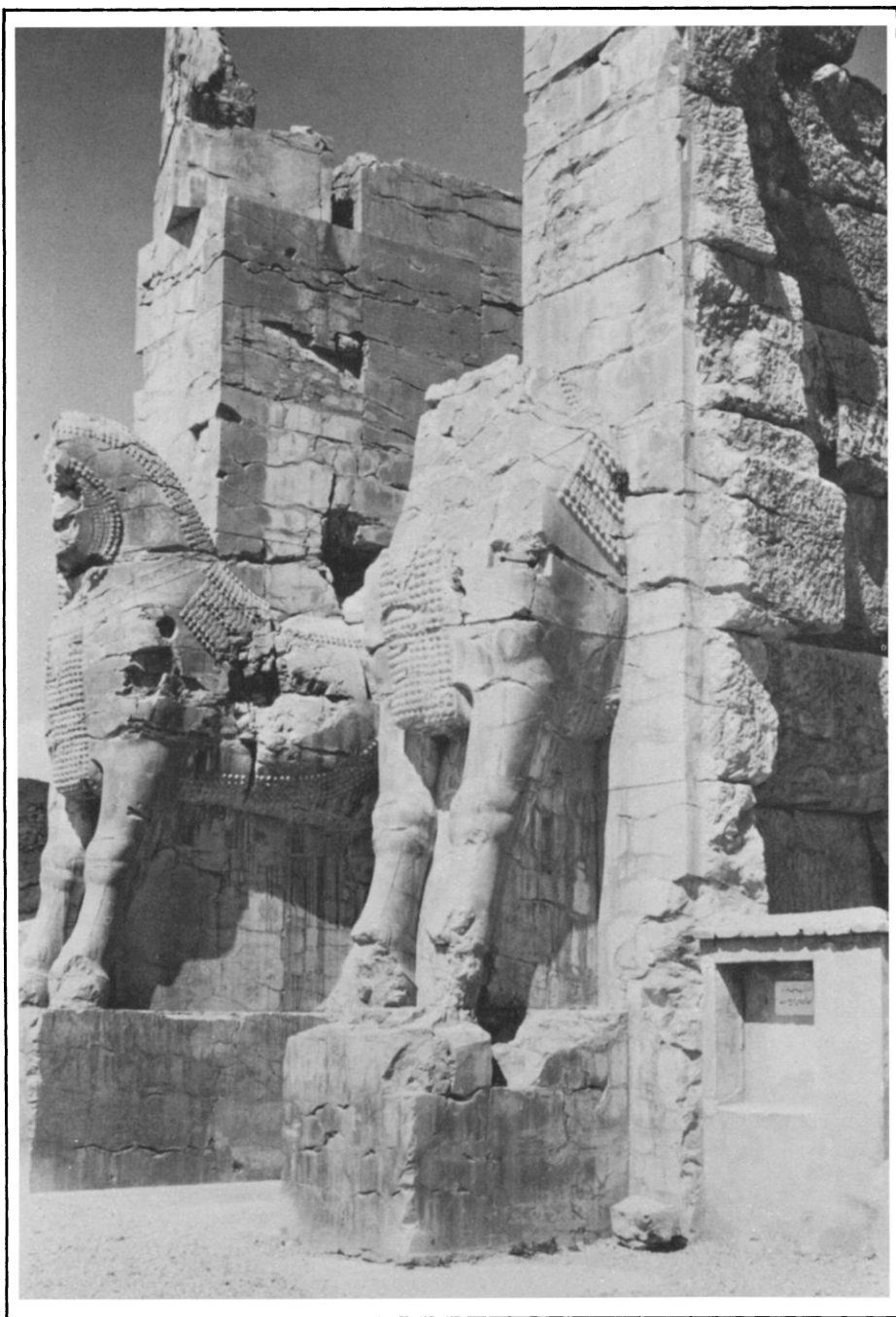
a reconstruction of the complete 12-day ritual.

Ritual Day 2, where the tablets start, begins before dawn as the high priest performs a simple set of opening rites which he will repeat daily during the festival. He washes with Euphrates river water which has been stored in a cistern, then he enters the presence of the high god, Bel-Marduk, and places a linen *gadalu*-towel before him. Here he recites a prayer dedicated to the sovereignty of the divine. Next the high priest opens the temple gate and admits the *eribbiti*, the priests who regularly carry out the temple rituals throughout the year, to perform the daily rites; the *kalu* priests and singers also enter at this time. A badly damaged section of the text here suggests that the high priest also has some additional acts to perform after sunrise, but these are, of course, now unknown.

Ritual Day 3 begins with the same opening ceremonies. Three hours after sunrise the high priest calls for workmen. He presents them with gold and jewels from the treasury and commands them to construct two small figurines, one holding a snake in the left hand and the other a scorpion. Both figures are to have their right hands raised to Nabu, patron of prayer and son of Marduk. These figures are to be dressed in red cloth until the sixth ritual day, when they will be decapitated. On Ritual Days 3-6 the high priest also makes a special distribution of the meat offerings. In these last two instances the text of Ritual Day 3 signals that Ritual Day 6, unfortunately missing from the present text, will be an important day.

Ritual Day 4 begins as the high priest performs his rite one and one-half hours earlier than on the previous days. He carries out the daily ritual, but before opening the temple gate, he recites special prayers to both Bel-Marduk and Beltiya-Zarpanitum, who are together in the Eudul temple. In his prayer to Bel-Marduk he begs the god to turn his face toward his own temple, Esaggil. The priest next enters the Exalted Courtyard, turns north, and three times blesses the empty Temple Esaggil. Then he opens the doors for the regular temple priest and the

... through the ages the carefully carved figures preserve their ancient secret ...



Monumental entryway, flanked by large animals. Photo by Steven Sidebotham.

additionally recite to Bel-Marduk the prayer "My Lord be Calm." Much of this prayer outlines the personification of the divine powers in the stars, planets, sun, and moon. It concludes by proclaiming the moon, "who brings darkness" after the setting of the sun, the "light of the world." This conclusion alludes to the sighting of the new moon, for the tips of the new crescent may be seen just after sunset. Its arrival was especially important, as the lunar calendar required an observation of the first appearance of the new moon on the western horizon. After the prayer to Bel-Marduk, the high priest recites a prayer to Beltiya in which he describes the various aspects of the goddess also personified in the heavens.

Later that day, two hours after sunrise, the exorcist priest (the *masmasu*) enters with his censer, torch, and kettledrum to purify the temple, but he remains in its courtyard, not entering the sanctuary. After completing his tasks there, he goes to the Ezida temple and enters Nabu's sanctuary with censer and torch. There he smears the doors with cedar resin, burns aromatics, and finally calls upon his assistant (the slaughterer priest) to decapitate a ram. That done, the exorcist takes the ram's body and the slaughterer its head, and they go to the river, face west, and throw the parts into the river. Both must then remain outside the city until the twelfth day, when Nabu will return to his shrine. The high priest has not been allowed to view the work of the exorcist, that is, the purification of the temple, for such a sight would make him unclean.

Three and one-half hours after sunrise, the activities of the exorcist having been completed in less than an hour and one-half, the high priest calls for the workmen. They bring the Golden Heaven from the treasury of Bel-Marduk and cover the Ezida temple, now purified. At the same time they cover the sanctuary of Nabu. Together the high priest and the workmen recite in a loud voice a prayer calling

singers. Following the second meal, in the late afternoon, the high priest recites the Babylonian creation epic, the *enuma eliš*, to Bel-Marduk. During this reading both the base of the statue of Enlil and the front of Anu's tiara, a symbol of kingly investiture, are covered. In the epic, the positions of Anu, head of the Babylonian pantheon, and of Enlil, considered both Anu's son and "father of the gods," are usurped by Tiamat and Kingu. Lest the reading anger these important gods, causing them to take

precipitous action and so destroy the beneficial effects of the festival, neither Anu nor Enlil is allowed to hear the epic read. Enlil's power to harm was especially great during this season, for he was the holder of the Tablets of Destiny, by which the fates of men and gods were determined each New Year.

Ritual Day 5 is a long and arduous day for both the priests and the king. The high priest begins his ceremonial before dawn, two hours earlier than on the second day. He performs the opening ritual as usual but today must

Monumental entryway at the back of the Persepolis complex. Photo by Steven Sidebotham.

upon Bel-Marduk to destroy the evil demon. Later in the day (the exact time is lost in the broken part of a tablet), the high priest enters Bel-Marduk's presence and places there a golden tray with "roasted meat, twelve usual loaves, a gold . . . filled with salt, a gold . . . filled with honey, . . . four gold dishes." He also places a gold censer before the tray, burns aromatics and cypress wood, and makes a libation of wine. Following a prayerful recitation, the high priest clears the tray, giving the contents to the workmen.

Next the high priest goes to bring Nabu from his shrine to the temple, where he will stay until the twelfth day; the king arrives at the same time. Nabu is central to the New Year's Festival ceremonies because he was associated with the sun at the winter solstice, with the planet Mercury, and with the star Aldebaran, holder of the destinies. This star had a heliacal rising in Taurus at the end of April, and it was this rising which announced the Babylonian New Year.

The workmen wash the king's hands, accompany him into the presence of Bel-Marduk, and leave him there. Now the king and the high priest are together in the room with the god. The high priest leaves the inner shrine and takes scepter, sword, and circle from the king, placing them on a chair before Bel-Marduk. He then returns to the king and strikes him on the cheek. Next he places something, perhaps the royal crown, behind the king and pulls him by the ears into the inner shrine, forcing him to bow to the ground and to testify before the god, "I did not sin, was not neglectful of godship, did not destroy Babylon." Here the high priest performs a Nabu-like role, purifying, testing, and cleansing "his son," the king, for his upcoming fight with the chaos demon.

The high priest assures the king that Bel-Marduk, who has undergone a parallel experience in the macrocosm, will hear his prayer and assist him in the destruction of the chaos demon. The king regains his composure; his



scepter, sword, and circle are returned to him. Again the high priest strikes his cheek, for tears must flow from the king's eyes in order for Bel-Marduk to be pleased. Bel-Marduk signifies his pleasure as he "takes the king's hands"; royal power and authority are restored.

The fifth ritual day concludes just before sunset. The high priest ties 40 straight, uncut reeds with a palm branch and stands them in a hole in the Exalted Courtyard, pouring over them honey, cream, and oil. The king then lights the bundle with a burning reed.

As the high priest begins to pray in the words "O Divine Bull, brilliant light," the Babylonian New Year tablets break off.

The New Year tablets have ended. The wooden figurines constructed on the third day will be decapitated on the sixth, and the special meat offerings will stop then. Other sources must aid in reconstructing the rest of the ritual, however. S. A. Pallis has prepared a superb study of the Babylonian ceremonies, and his work influenced H. Frankfort's attempt at their restora-

... "they give him
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tion. These two scholars provide the best guide for any attempt to comprehend the events of the last seven days of the festival, although they overemphasize the theme of Marduk's death and resurrection and of Tammuz; a number of the fragments which underlie their work refer to ceremonies held at other seasons.

Many aspects of the last seven days of the Babylonian ceremonies may be extrapolated from the Babylonian creation epic, the *enuma eliš* (Doria and Lenowitz 1976: 182-236). This epic occurs on a series of seven tablets, with duplicates of several of the tablets. New finds in recent years have filled in some of the gaps in the text, and this fuller version allows for important new understandings of the Babylonian New Year's ritual, particularly concerning the events of the seventh day. It is also interesting in this context to note that, while the text of the *enuma eliš* is regarded as an example of the literary style of ca. 1500 B.C., Tablet 5 was copied to be placed in the palace of Assurbanipal of Assyria (668-626 B.C.), and one of the duplicates of Tablet 1 is dated in the 27th year of Darius (495 B.C.).

In the Babylonian New Year's ritual, it was the text of *enuma eliš* which the high priest read in front of the figure of Marduk in late afternoon of the fourth day, and the primary function of that reading of the epic was the transmission of the basic myth. Events in the epic are parallel to the sequence of events in the New Year's ritual; thus aspects of the ritual may be seen in the epic. For example, the contents of Tablet 1 and most of Tablet 2 are consistent with the description in the *Temple Program* tablets of the fourth day of the Babylonian ritual, the day when the high priest reads the epic to the god. Again, the epic's portrayal of the arrival of Bel-Marduk and of the triple request for an assembly of the gods to convey sovereignty upon him after he defeats Tiamat is consistent with the portrayal in the *Temple Program* tablets of the arrival of the king on Ritual Day 5. And when in the epic Marduk is given the assurance: "They give him scepter, throne, and ball, invincible weapons and foe-undoers," this is paralleled by the restoration of royal authority in Babylon. This correspondence of the

enuma eliš with the extant Babylonian ritual supports a hypothetical reconstruction of the remaining days of the New Year's liturgy based on the epic.

The Reconstructed Babylonian Ritual

Ritual Day 6 celebrates the fight and victory of the king, acting in harmony with Bel-Marduk, over the chaos demon, Tiamat. With Tiamat's defeat, her consort Kingu is subdued. The Tablets of Destiny, whose misuse has brought the cosmos to travail, become the possession of reason and order. The Tablets of Destiny are like two stones on which the sacred law is written. In the first casting of Destinies, the divine universe and its holy microcosm, the established social order, are reconstituted. The second casting of Destinies determines the particular details of promotions for individuals in the government and announces the imperial goals for the new year. At the second casting of Destinies, the people are commanded to obey the king and his officers. To gain these Tablets of Destiny, the king must fight against evil in a ritual battle. The king arms himself with a bow, a toothed sickle, and a net against the chaos demon and her vanguard army, represented by the wooden figurines constructed on the third day. He carries a sword in his right hand and holds a plant or sacred flower as a talisman against poison. As he faces Tiamat for a climactic battle, the priests (representing the gods) "race around him" four times.

In the presence of Tiamat's great evil the king's mind becomes confused. The priests march at his side and assist him to act in an orderly and reasonable manner. He then calls upon Tiamat to prepare for a duel. He subdues her with his net, shoots her with an arrow, and, as a sign of victory, places his foot upon her. Her allies flee. The king takes the Tablets of Destiny from Kingu and puts them around his own neck. He then raises the dead Tiamat upon her legs and splits her head; the images created on day three are decapitated. Finally, the king erects a reed-house shrine.

Ritual Day 7 coincides with the beginning of Tablet 5 of the epic. One may assume that, in accordance with the established pattern, the high priest first performs the daily rituals

previously described in the *Temple Program*. After his rites, the foundations of creation are ceremonially reestablished. The king begins this reestablishment by placing in position the stands for the figurines of the cotemplar gods. Next he establishes the ritual calendar by setting forth the pattern for observation of the stars and moon. He opens the water courses, so ensuring rain in the new year. Finally, he builds chapels for the gods and, with the Tablets of Destiny, he prepares for the institution of a year of orderly rule.

Ritual Day 8 features the casting of the First Destinies. As in the epic all the sky and earth gods kiss the feet of Marduk, so the priests and nobility bow before the king acknowledging his supremacy. Sitting upon his high throne, he holds the sickle sword in his right hand, rests the bow on his shoulder, and takes the scepter in his left hand. Bel-Marduk announces the building of an assembly hall, a resting place for the gods; the king provides his priests and nobles with a similar place. Marduk's new ritual center is named Bab-il, "City at the gate of the gods." There the conquered peoples shall serve the needs of the priests and nobles. Once again all bow before the king, proclaiming that he is lord. As Marduk has created man to serve the gods, so the king commands the people to serve both shrine and state.

Ritual Day 9 presents the great processional to the festival hall and the establishment of an enthronement house for Marduk at the top of the ziggurat. Acts of rebellion against the orderly world are again ascribed to Tiamat and Kingu, from whose blood, in the *enuma eliš*, mankind is created. The king's next act, prior to establishing the new laws for the year, is to announce promotions and the division of responsibility throughout the world, just as Marduk established the roles of the gods of the sky and of the 600 gods on earth. The ninth day's activities conclude with the building of a brick rest-house as the place of Marduk's enthronement at the highest spot in the ritual city.

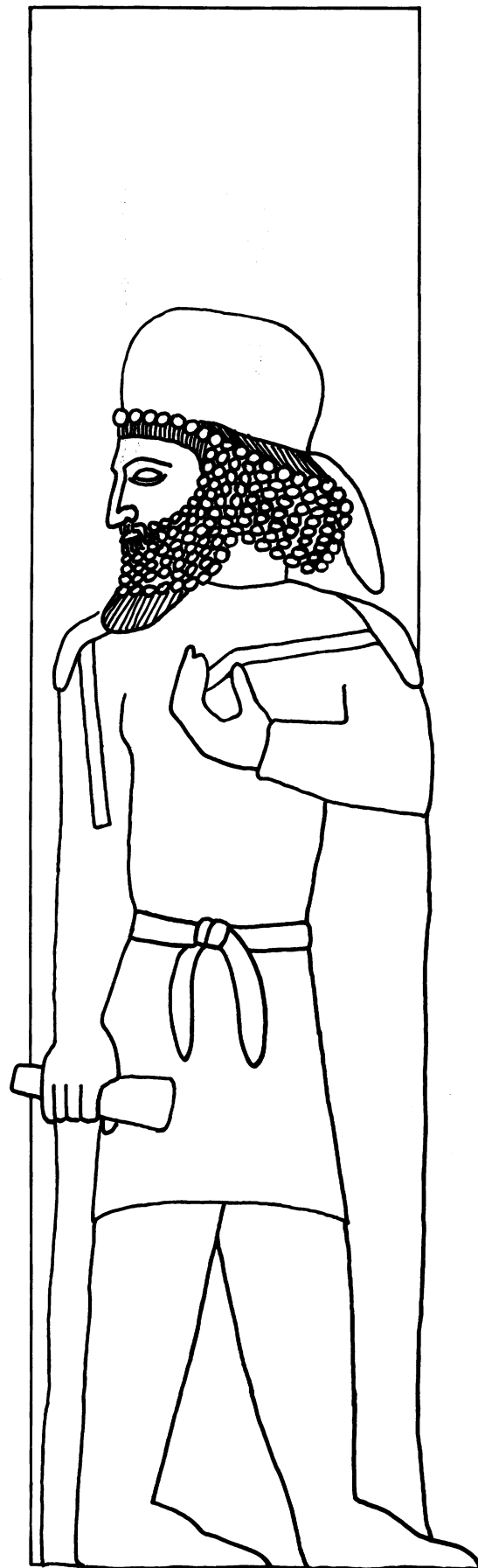
Ritual Day 10 features the banquet and the sacred marriage. In the *enuma eliš* Marduk sets the gods, his fathers, down to a feast where they drink festal beer and grow happy; so

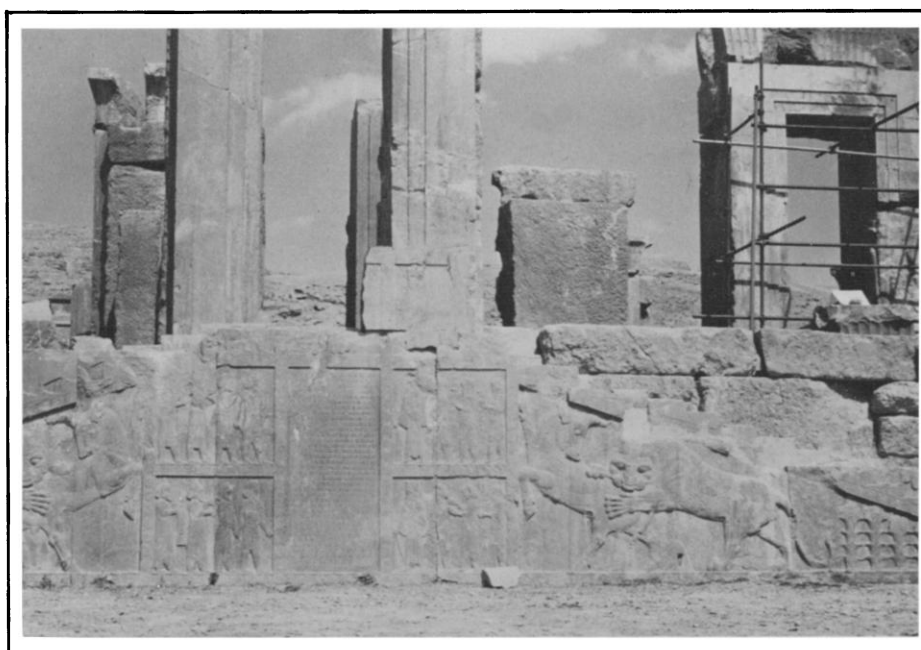
too the king feasts the priests and nobles, then posts the laws and fates for the new year. The high priest, representing the god Anu, presents to the assembled host the bow and net which he made and which the king as Bel-Marduk used in his victory over Tiamat. The king praises the bow and kisses it, calling it his daughter and associating it with the star Sirius, brightest of the heavens, which the high priest described on Ritual Day 5 in prayer to Marduk as the one which "measures the waters of the sea." The high priest thus suggests that the sacred marriage be celebrated, associating the bow ceremony with the invocation of the great star of fertility to consummate the marriage.

Ritual Day 11 establishes the Second Destinies, which command the "black-headed" people to support the king and the gods by obedience, offerings of food, building up the land, and construction of shrines. Shrine-building is not of divine import only, for it signifies increased royal and priestly control of the hinterland. The *enuma eliš* concludes with a tribute to Marduk, who is known by 50 names. Ritual Day 11 surely concludes with a similar tribute to the king, for Marduk's 50 names are all attributes of the king's religious, social, and political responsibility; they manifest his position in the cult as director of the nobility and commander of the army.

Ritual Day 12 reestablishes the normal political and social order of the realm with the return of Nabu to his shrine and the reentry of the exorcist and slaughterer priests into the city. Nabu's return to his shrine marks the king's return to his normal activities and his withdrawal from the sacred area. At the time of the winter solstice, however, the king or his deputy will come back to the temple.

So ends the sacred drama of Babylonia. Unfortunately, the ruins of Babylon provide little basis for additional development of the details of the ritual. At the ceremonial city of Persepolis, however, the mute figures reflect a story much like the one told in the *enuma eliš* and ritually performed in Babylon. Surely Persepolis, one of the best-preserved sites of ancient times, was constructed for celebration of a similar New Year's festival. This ritual city abounds in figures whose





Above: the *tachara* of Darius. **Below:** close-up of the monumental reliefs at the *tachara* stairway. **Opposite:** the eastern

staircase of the Apadana. Photos by Steven Sidebotham.

origins lie in a Neo-Babylonian understanding of royal and priestly order. Perhaps careful scrutiny of these figures, of these ruins of ceremonial structures, may yield evidence of a ritual celebration like that of Babylon.

Evidence for a New Year's Festival at Persepolis

What evidence exists at Persepolis to support such a claim? Is it likely that the rulers of Persia were ritually influenced by Babylonia? How familiar were the Persians with Babylonian myths such as the *enuma elis*? What contemporary records remain to document Babylonian influence in Persepolis?

In fact, a wealth of sculptural, artistic, and linguistic evidence points to extensive Babylonian influence at Persepolis. While the overall plan for the construction of the city is purely Achaemenid, scholars agree that it is heavily indebted to Neo-Babylonian and Assyrian art forms. Ahuramazda, the Achaemenid god, is depicted at

Persepolis in a Neo-Babylonian/ Assyrian style, with wings, circle, crown, and upraised right hand. Again, the 14 window inscriptions in the *tachara* of Darius at Persepolis are written in Elamite, Old Persian, and Babylonian; the Babylonian language shared status with the ancestral Persian tongues.

Additional evidence of many kinds points to intimate Persian familiarity with the mythology of the *enuma eliš* and the Babylonian New Year's ritual. The clay barrel inscription of Cyrus states that Marduk searched all the world seeking a righteous ruler willing to lead the god in the annual procession and chose Cyrus, known as the beloved of Bel and Nebo. Again, many seals have been found at Persepolis depicting the Neo-Babylonian/ Assyrian mythology with the king, as Bel-Marduk, fighting the demon Tiamat. Aspects of this same conflict are depicted in the two *hadishes*, in the Hall of 100 Columns, and on the east-west doorways of Darius' *tachara*. In fact, a colophon to Tablet I of the *enuma eliš* itself states that it was copied in the 27th year of Darius' reign.

The extent of Babylonian influence, both secular and religious, cannot, then, be denied. Persian kings knew the Babylonian mythology well and considered themselves implicated in its meaning. But did they in fact perform a ritual drama based on that mythology, did they celebrate a festival like that of the Babylonian kings? Records and inscriptions would suggest that they did, or at least that they were well prepared with all things necessary for holding such a festival. Inscriptions at Persepolis provide ample detail about payments made to artisans such as vintners, gold workers, wood carvers, and shepherds, all of whom would be necessary for the complex production of a New Year's Festival of the Babylonian type. These inscriptions contain not only names, but receipts for libations of wine and offerings to be made to various gods. Surviving records also show the maintenance of a full staff of priests for the execution of the daily liturgy and the annual festivals.

Everything essential for a New Year's festival is provided at



Persepolis, then, or everything but a temple. Where is the temple for the festival celebration? Herodotus reports that the Persians had neither temple nor altar; can he have been wrong? And what about the long-discussed Zoroastrian influence upon the Achemenids?

The Temple: Darius' *Tachara*?

Among the buildings on the stone terrace platform at Persepolis, Darius' *tachara*, usually known as the Palace of Darius, most nearly satisfies the requirements for a Neo-Babylonian ritual temple. Located at the highest elevation on the platform, the *tachara*, with its Exalted Courtyard, Processional Gates, and inner shrine rooms, contains the areas requisite for celebrating the Mesopotamian myth.

If the *tachara* was indeed the temple, the plan of the city of Persepolis should, on a grander scale, resemble the plans of other Neo-Babylonian cities. Numerous such cities had temples dedicated to a local deity and containing shrines for the co-templar gods, whose names varied with the location whereas their functions stayed much the same. Provincial cities frequently contained small temples, built on a scale slightly larger than that

of a noble's residence. All ritual functions took place there within a single building. As the city grew in size and wealth, it added other buildings to the shrine for the expansion of certain ritual aspects. The plan of Persepolis is reminiscent of this pattern, while reflecting the grandeur of an imperial center; the *tachara* contains all rooms necessary for the ritual, and the Apadana, the Tripylon, and the Gate of All Peoples are elaborations on the theme for the purpose of expressing a richer, more complete form of the sacred drama.

The portals of the various rooms in the *tachara* best define its use and the nature of the ritual which must have been performed there. The left and right jamb of each door in the structure is decorated with stylized carvings. The carvings mirror one another, except in a few extremely significant instances. Doors P-4, P-5, and P-6 (all Persepolis portals are numbered according to a standard convention) lie on an east-west axis established by the sunline at the equinox. They portray the king fighting a demon. Each door depicts the demon as a different fantastic beast, all of which are composites, formed by the incongruous conflation of the parts of several animals. They

. . . with its Exalted Courtyard, Processional Gates, and inner shrine rooms, the *tachara* contains the areas requisite for celebrating the New Year ritual . . .

are similar to the allies of Tiamat described in the *enuma eliš* and correspond to what Berossus, 3rd-century priest of Bel-Marduk, called creatures of the chaos demoness. Door P-4 shows a sort of lion; P-5, a griffin with a feathered lion's head, wings, bird legs, and feathered tail; and P-6, a kind of bull or cow.

Two additional small doors, P-9 and P-10, beside Rooms 4 and 17, show the king holding a lion cub by the neck. Scholars consider these carvings older than the others at Persepolis and of a distinctly late Assyrian/Neo-Babylonian style. It has been suggested, as an attempt to explain these disparities, that these stones may have been transported to Persepolis from another site and then reused. These doors contain the only examples of the king-lion theme not on the equinox sunline.

The royal processional doors, P-1, P-2, and P-3, show the king, bearded, in full royal attire, and accompanied by two men, one smooth-faced and one bearded. The beardless man is probably a eunuch priest, though some have suggested that he is a youth. He appears at various locations in the *tachara*, associated with three objects: a towel, an ointment jar, and a bull whisk. The bearded man, who carries the processional umbrella over the head of the king, appears here and in the northeastern cluster of rooms with a censer and a pail, all objects used for rites of purification and adoration. The northeastern cluster of rooms (13, 14, and 15) also shows him holding the censer and pail. Although the rooms in the northwestern corner of the building have been destroyed, the symmetry of the site suggests that similar carvings would be found there.

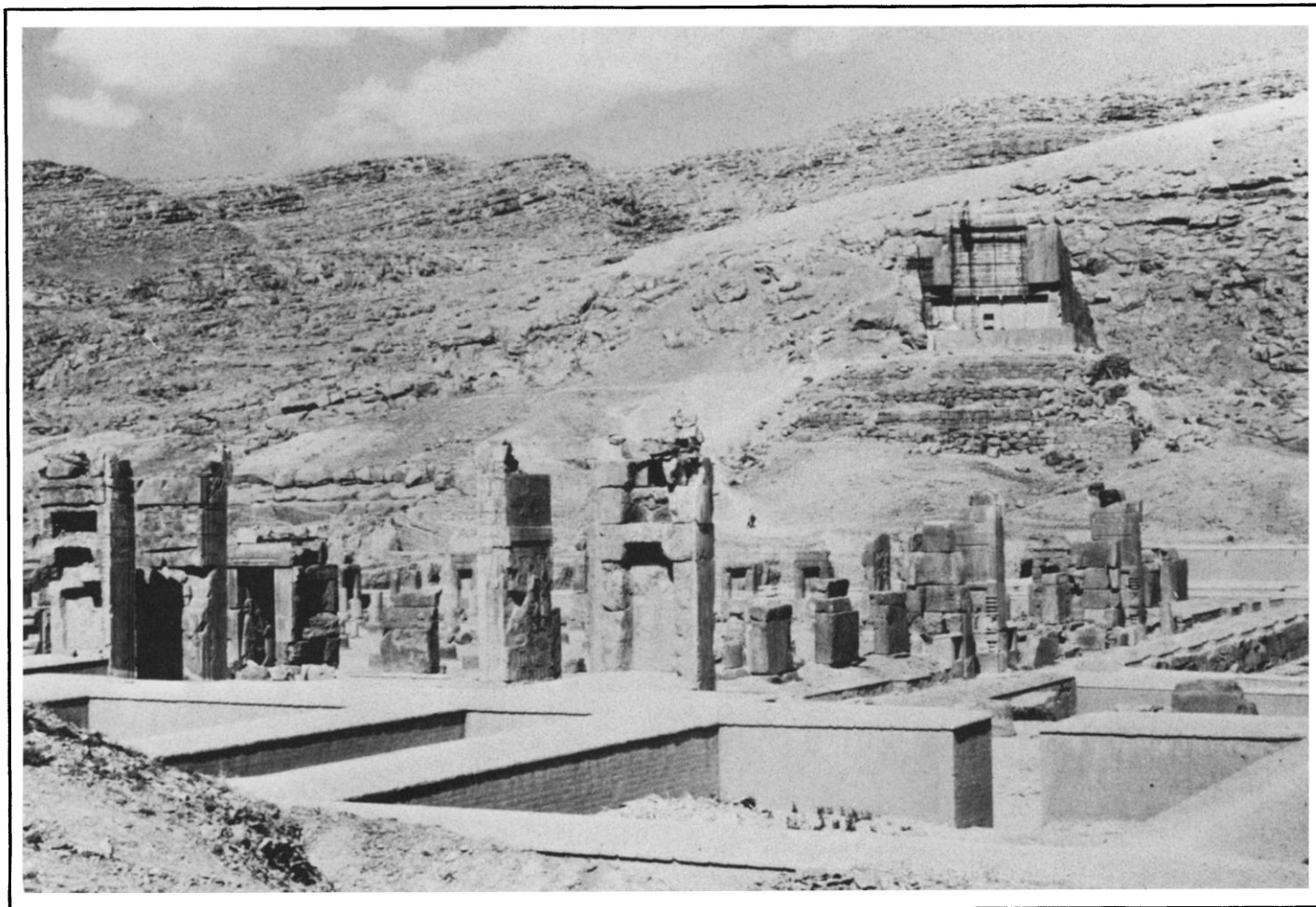
On Door P-1 the bearded man leaves the area with empty hands crossed at the wrists. He follows the smooth-faced man, who carries a four-pleated cloth over his left arm and holds the bull whisk high over the king's head. The order of procession preserves what must be the ceremonial rank of the participants: the king goes first, the smooth-faced man bearing towel and bull whisk is second, and the bearded man, having left his ceremonial objects within this cluster of rooms, follows both. While the

bearded man is apparently a regular priest, chief of those who perform daily services at Persepolis throughout the year, the smooth-faced man must be a eunuch high priest. He is defined as high priest by his placement in the audience-scene carving found in the Treasury building, where he stands directly behind Prince Xerxes and in front of the soldier. He also appears in several locations alone with the king.

Eunuch priests traditionally bear service to a goddess, but they are also especially well suited to serve in high places as a ritual substitute for a king. As a eunuch is incapable of engendering children, he is separated from the pattern of marriage and family which is part of the king's role and so does not threaten the king's position and power. Physically impaired, he is assumed to be correspondingly freed from carnal concerns for spiritual desire.

Preparations for decorative ornamentation on Doors P-1 and P-2 show that they are the most important portals at Persepolis. On both doors, as on P-3, the main carved figure is that of the king, followed by the two priests, moving into the courtyard. On all three doors the figure of the king has been mortised in several places. Slots have been cut in the stone for a necklace and for bracelets at the wrists, and the crown has been prepared for a decorative overlay; on Doors P-1 and P-2 alone a large mortise awaits an ornamental beard. Indeed, numerous fragments of lapis lazuli beards have been found at Persepolis. Although Door P-3, which shows the king leaving the courtyard and entering the porch, was mortised like the other two doors for bracelets, a necklace, and crown ornamentation, a beard is part of the regular carving of its figure.

The uniqueness of the carvings on these three processional doors suggests special significance in the rooms to which they lead, and especially in the rooms beyond P-1 and P-2. No other doors in any building at Persepolis have been mortised for decorative elaboration, and only P-1 and P-2 are prepared for a lapis beard. P-1 and P-2 must, then, open into the two most important rooms at Persepolis. Their decorations disclose the purpose of the rooms to which they lead, ritual activity in which the figure of the king



Tomb of Artaxerxes II. Royal stables in foreground. Photo by Steven Sidebotham.

is central. These rooms appear to be an inner sanctum.

Darius' *tachara* deserves serious consideration as the heretofore missing temple of Persepolis. Its location, floor plan, and artistic embellishments argue for such a hypothesis. Even the word "*tachara*" may point in that direction, for while it has traditionally been understood as "palace," it may also signify "shrine." Perhaps a ritual drama like that of Babylon was indeed performed at Persepolis, in the *tachara* of Darius.

The Ritual Function of the *Tachara* Rooms

The floor plan of the *tachara* may now be understood in light of the *tachara*'s identification as the temple of Persepolis. Each room or cluster of rooms can, with the help of the portal carvings, be interpreted in terms of its

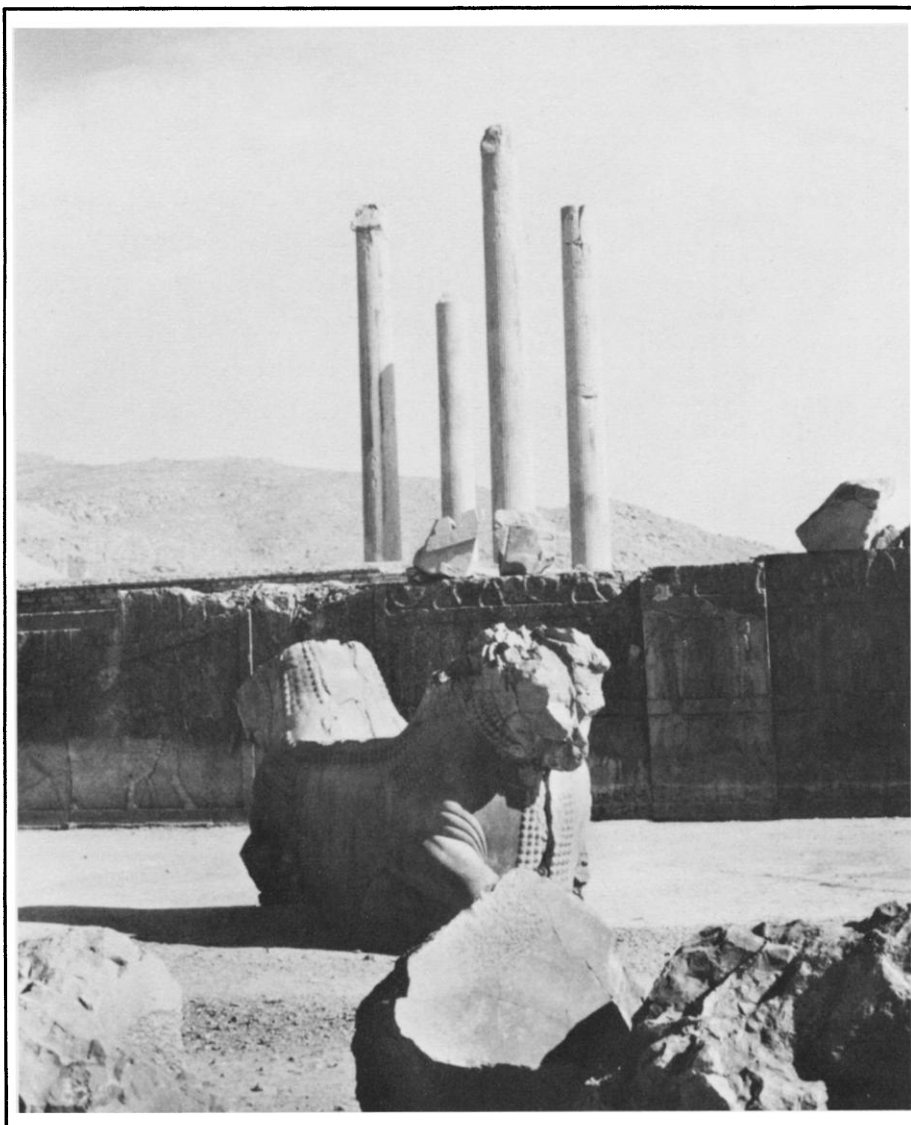
role in the sacred drama. This analysis of the temple and its ceremonial use may, then, contribute to a reconstruction of the ceremonies performed at Persepolis and, ultimately, to the religious and political self-understanding of Darius and his heirs.

As suggested above, the rooms along the northern side of the *tachara*'s central courtyard must form the inner sanctum of the temple. The northeast cluster of rooms (10, 12, 13, 14, and 15), entered through Door P-1, forms the largest single unit in the *tachara*; it may logically be sacred to Ahuramazda, the Achaemenid equivalent of Bel-Marduk. The Babylonian name for this area was the Esaggil. (The names of the temple areas are, of course, the ones from the Babylonian ritual and the *enuma eliš*. They are transferred and used here because the Persian names are not known.) Within this unit, Room 15 would be the prayer room (Esizkur) where the god seizes the king's hands and restores his power. The northwest cluster of rooms

(7, 8, 9, and 11), entered through Door P-2, is therefore Eudul, shrine of Artanaitis, the Achaemenid Beltiya-Zarpanitum and consort of Ahuramazda. This unit has one fewer room than the Ahuramazda area because Room 6 connects the central courtyard to the stairway leading to the platform which overlooks the plain. Room 15 is a mirror image of the plain.

Within these nine rooms on the north side of the *tachara* courtyard, Rooms 10 and 11 appear to have been reserved for the eunuch high priest, who is pictured entering them with an ointment jar and the four-pleated towel. Room 10 may have served as the residence for the image of Artanaitis when she visited Ahuramazda; Room 11 could then have provided residence for the image of the god when he left his own sacred area, specifically during the beginning of the New Year's festival.

The two rooms on the western side of the courtyard would have been occupied by a god performing a



A stone statue of a bull, with the Apadana in the background. Photo by Steven Sidebotham.

somewhat easier if more information were available about the gods worshipped there and their functions. More important, Darius' reasons for constructing a wholly new ceremonial city for performance of the sacred drama must be examined for understanding of the significance of that drama for him and for his heirs.

Only scanty evidence survives regarding the gods worshipped at Persepolis. Mitra has no explicit role here during this early period; in fact, the name of this famous Persian god does not appear in writing at the site until the reign of Artaxerxes II, (404-359 B.C.). Again, Anu, Enlil, and Nabu, originally ancient Sumerian city gods, cannot be identified by name at Persepolis. Although their roles had become a standard part of the general Mesopotamian myth, they appeared during the period under various names and with various honors at different sites. At Persepolis itself, a large collection of cylinder seals of both local and foreign manufacture attests to the popularity of these gods and to a knowledge of their functions in a New Year's festival. In translations of the fortification tablets published by R. Hallock (1969: 5-19), the names of several Achaemenid gods, among them Simut, Adad (a familiar Akkadian figure), Misdusi, and Humban appear. Humban, the god most frequently mentioned in the tablets, is awarded three times the amount of wine given to Ahuramazda. These same gods are among those "many gods" mentioned by Darius in Column 4 of the Behistun Inscription (Kent 1953: 132).

The Treasury tablets, published by G. Cameron (1948: 6), record numerous Persian temple names such as Partetash, Raudamati, Kapi rap, and Marsashka. While these temple names cannot at present be identified with a particular area, it is important to note that the names of gods who received special offerings and the names of temple shrines and altars

function like that of Nabu at Babylon. A scorpion-tailed griffin in combat with the king decorates Door P-5, which leads into these rooms. In the Babylonian plan this area is called Ezida.

The facing rooms on the eastern side of the courtyard (Rooms 16 and 17) may have been associated with Ekua, the sanctuary of primal lands and origins. "Ekua is the earth as a mountain, lying in the east," says S. A. Pallis (1926: 94); Persepolis itself epitomizes such a sanctuary. In the Babylonian tablets the high priest associates himself with Ekua when he addresses the god. Door P-4, carved with scenes of the king fighting a lion demon, opens into these two rooms.

The Exalted Courtyard, a large courtyard with 12 windows, lies at the center of the *tachara*. Although 8 of the

windows are properly only niches, 4 are open windows located so as to provide a view out of the courtyard, through the porch, and into the plain. The 2 windows in the southwest corner of the courtyard are of highly polished stone which so reflects light that they appear to be jet black mirrors. The courtyard also contains foundation stones for 12 symmetrically placed columns. Rooms 3 and 18, which open out of the courtyard onto the porch and are guarded by carved figures of soldiers, may have been treasury rooms. The courtyard connects the various ritual rooms. Within its confines numerous actions will be performed during the days of the festival.

The Gods and Cult of Persepolis
Reconstruction of the festival ceremonies at Persepolis would be

of oblation have been found at Persepolis. The Treasury tablets also mention a Persian All Prosperity Gate. This is similar to one described in a Babylonian tablet which lists gates associated with the restorative powers of Marduk.

Finally, what was the nature and purpose of the Persepolis ritual? Why did Darius construct a new ceremonial city for performance of that ritual? The *tachara*, understood as temple, and the ritual to be reconstructed on its evidence would argue that the Persepolis ritual was designed to provide legitimacy to Darius, a foreigner and usurper of the Persian throne, and to win both people and priesthood to his party. What Cyrus was able to do so successfully at Babylon when he became Marduk's chosen friend, Darius sought to extend on an international scale at Persepolis. Rather than a ritual like the liturgy for a native ruler as remembered in the *enuma eliš*, the ceremonies at Persepolis were similar to the late Babylonian Akitu ritual noted by J. Z. Smith (1976), a ritual redesigned to legitimize a foreign ruler, to win his acceptance by both people and priests.

The *enuma eliš*, originally reflecting Sumerian city worship, was repeatedly modified and adapted over the ages for use by new dynasties. Each dynasty sought public acceptance, and so legitimacy, by demonstrating its support for, and basis in, the ancient Mesopotamian mythology, which contained the seminal story of the origin and order of the cosmos. In his struggle with Bardiya-Gaumata, Darius must have found abundant economic and political support for his claim to power from among Mesopotamianized peoples. His acceptance and official adoption of the fundamental Mesopotamian mythology would have demonstrated to those peoples his willingness to rule the world on the basis of the cosmic order defined in the *enuma eliš*, with its well-established pattern of royal, priestly, and military rights and prerogatives.

In its concern with the control and distribution of property, the *enuma eliš* reflects the socio-economic priorities of a civilization

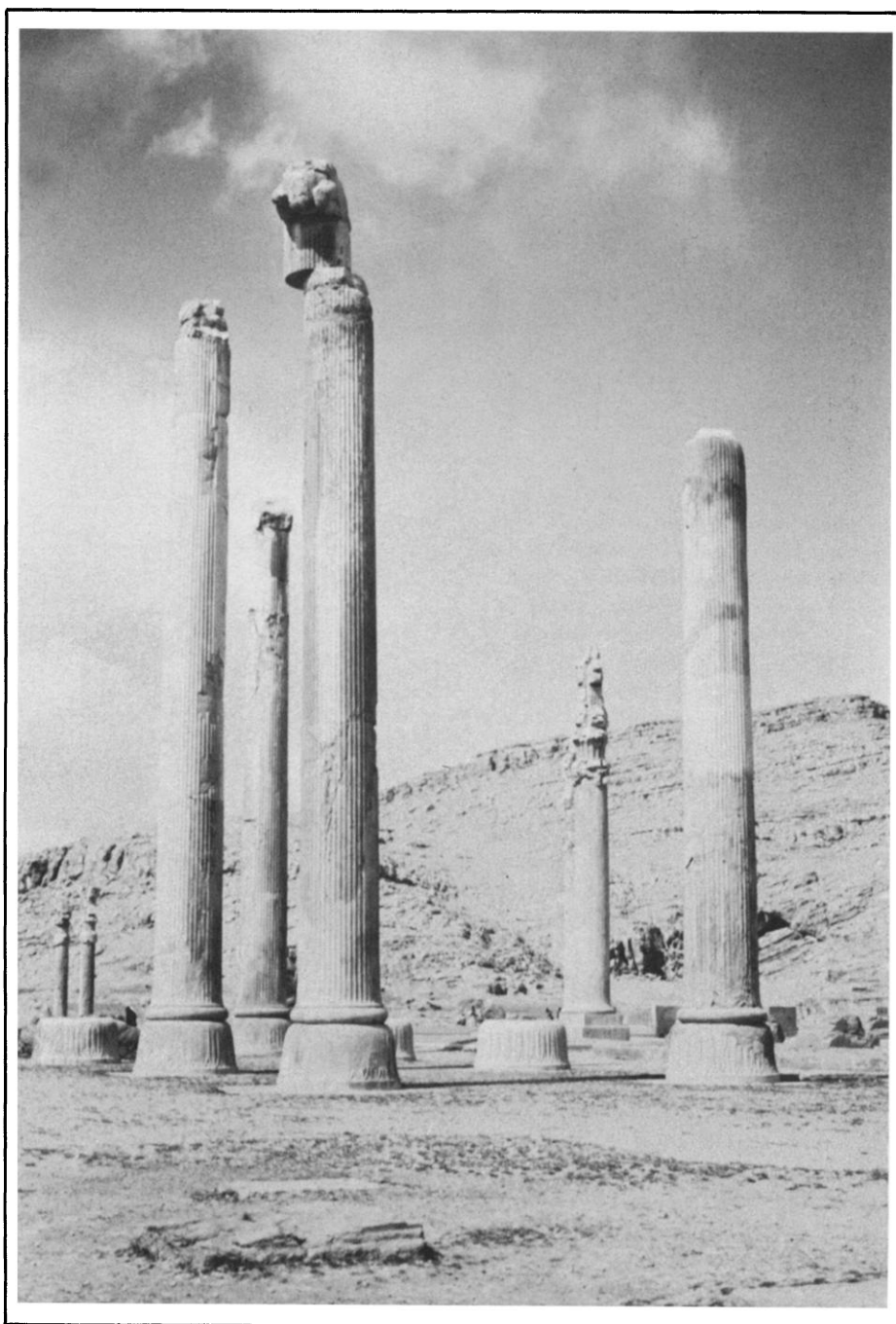
originally ruled by priests, but for thousands of years dominated by kings. The priests were the bankers of Achaemenid society and protectors of its property rights; by his ceremonial use of the ancient epic, Darius reassured these key economic forces that old ways would be continued under his rule—that he participated in and would preserve the Mesopotamian value system. Additionally, he added a number of unique Achaemenid adaptations, which were popular with local priests and at national shrines.

Darius constructed a new ceremonial site for the ritual based on the *enuma eliš* precisely because he could not present them at Pasargadae, where exclusively Persio-Median religious/civil rites were preserved and maintained. With Darius' seizure of the throne, the Persian religious system developed two levels, a national Persio-Median religion, perhaps proto-Zoroastrian, and an international cult in explicit harmony with the dominant Mesopotamian myth. This latter, international, religion would assure the satrapies that the Achaemenids were a sophisticated and cultured people.

Darius had already sought politically in the Behistun message to establish his legitimacy on the throne of Persia. He built Persepolis for much the same reason—to confirm his hegemony ritually and religiously. Darius constructed his new city and established the performance of the sacred drama there so that Ahuramazda and the other Persio-Median gods might become a part of a syncretic Mesopotamian culture. Through it he and his heirs would be able to rule effectively over a worldwide Achaemenid empire in which local and national gods would be allowed to preserve their identity. The Elamites, for example, did not worship Ahuramazda, according to the Behistun inscription. The construction of a new religious center and ritual thus strengthened Darius' international ties while leaving Persio-Median practices uninterrupted.

The New Year's Festival at Persepolis
Darius' construction of a new ceremonial site and the structural and sculptural revelations of that site

. . . the Persepolis ritual was designed to provide legitimacy in the eyes of the people and the priesthood for Darius and his heirs . . .



Columns of the Apadana. Photo by Steven Sidebotham.

provide evidence for reconstruction of the ceremonies performed there. Knowledge of the form and function of the Babylonian New Year's ritual can also contribute to an understanding of elements likely to be present in a New Year's ritual at Persepolis. Ancient physical and ritual evidence may be combined, then, into a new script for an old play; Marduk-like, we will

attempt to create whole cloth from the warp of extant ruins and the woof of literary remains.

The New Year at Persepolis, as in Babylon, begins with the sighting in the west of the first points of the first new moon after the spring equinox. Direct observation was necessary, as court astronomers in the 6th century B.C. could not foretell with accuracy the day when the new moon would appear (Neugebauer 1957: 41). Persepolis is perfectly constructed for a western sighting of a new moon. (Indeed, not

until ca. 450 B.C., in the middle of the reign of Artaxerxes I, were astronomers able to predict the rise of the new moon on the basis of a 19-year cycle, without recourse to direct observation; construction work at Persepolis stopped abruptly after the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes I, ca. 457 B.C.)

Persepolis Ritual Day 1 begins when the bearded priest, whose functions are those of the Babylonian *eribbiti*, starts the daily liturgy at sunset. He enters the presence of Ahuramazda and Arta-anaitis, who are together in Eudul, the northwest cluster of rooms in the Darius *tachara*. (All divine names and place designations unknown in Persian are referred to in this reconstruction by their Babylonian names.) The Arta-anaitis image, ministered to by a eunuch priest, may be in her private chapel (Room 11) at this time. After a signal from the bearded priest, musicians and other lesser priests of the *kalu*-type, bearing food and other offerings, enter the courtyard from their quarters beneath the base of the south wall of the platform. Some of these priests, depicted in the stonework without mustache or beard, are eunuchs, and certain of the eunuchs attend upon the goddess.

Before Ritual Day 1 the king and his entourage will have arrived at Persepolis and taken up residence in the large complex of buildings in the southeast corner of the platform. The eunuch high priest, like the *urigallu*, who will officiate over the most important aspects of the ritual action, has also arrived. Priests from subject nations of the Achaemenid world are present and, with a host of Achaemenid and Median nobles, have encamped in the area enclosed by the Pulvar River. Family and foreign visitors celebrate their daily sacraments in numerous portable shrines and permanent buildings which dot the plain between the river and the platform. Members of the extended family of Cyrus the Great, however, gather and pitch their tents near the tomb of Cambyses II (reigned 530-522 B.C.), where a permanent temple structure stands.

High on the platform astronomers are busy with calculations of the stars and their omens. In the astrological gardens some compute propitious

times, and through the cones adorning the parapet south of the *tachara*, others make sightings and record them. They scratch their equations, in the forms of circles and lions, on stone bricks like the one reclaimed in modern times from the detritus beneath the platform wall. The omens and calculations of the astronomers establish the propitious time for the movement of the king from Eudul into Esaggil. The Marduk symbol (an arrow) cut into a parapet stone here associates the Babylonian New Year's ritual with Persepolis, and Marduk with Ahuramazda.

Women are, apparently, banned from the ritual area. The king's harem is with him in his residential palace east of the sacred buildings (Gropp 1971: 48). A separate Arta-anaitis shrine about 100 m south-southwest of the platform may be for women's use.

On this first day of the festival hundreds of men and boys are engaged in the last-minute details of filling the water reservoirs from the Pulvar, herding sheep, transporting wine and fruit, and preparing the buildings for the celebration. New gold crowns have been placed on the figures of the king in the *tachara* doorways, and bracelets, necklaces, and lapis beards have been attached to the freshly painted stonework. Soldiers of the Immortal Guard stand at the doors, their shadows preserved forever in the stone behind them. They guard not only the large door to the western plain, but the two small rooms opening onto the porch as well. The first day closes with everything in readiness for the celebration itself.

Persepolis Ritual Day 2 begins in the early evening when the bearded priest and his associates, those who perform the daily temple services throughout the year, complete their sunset rituals. Two hours before dawn the high priest enters the temple and washes with Pulvar River water which has been stored in the large reservoir beneath the buildings of Persepolis. Next he presents himself before Ahuramazda and places a linen towel, a *galadu*, in front of the god. At Persepolis this *galadu*, the four-pleated towel seen in the carvings, is in the exclusive keeping of the eunuch priest. The god is now in Room 9 (Eudul, the sanctuary of Arta-anaitis), for he has left his own shrine.



On this second ritual day the high priest offers a prayer before the god before opening the gate to the regular priesthood. He reminds the gods of the chaos caused by the acts of the people of the Lie, associates of Tiamat and Kingu.

Persepolis Ritual Day 3 begins with daily rites performed at sunset. The high priest next enters the temple for predawn ceremonies, but not until three hours after sunrise does he summon a metalworker and present him with gold and precious stones from

Columns at the entrance of the Persepolis complex. Photo by Steven Sidebotham.

the Treasury to be used in forming two images. A woodworker, a goldsmith, and a weaver will join the metalworker in the construction of the figures. They will shape one image of cedar—wood of the tree of life, revealer of the oracles of earth and heaven. The other figure will be of tamarisk, from earliest times considered a purifying wood and



associated with the divine. Both images will raise the right hand, like Ahuramazda in his Persepolis representations. In its left hand the cedar figure will hold a snake; the tamarisk figure, a scorpion. Both figurines are to be clothed in red material woven by the court weaver, in contrast with the purple garments of the king and the Persian nobles. The stone work of Persepolis was brightly painted, and all the participants wore blue shoes, red stockings, and purple robes.

Sheep offerings are made to Ahuramazda on this day and on the three following days. This offering may have been a plea that the god take the lead in combatting evil, or it may represent Nisan as the month of the constellation Aries, even though Nisan and Aries were no longer in conjunction during Achaemenid times.

After removing the offerings from the god's table, the high priest gives them to the four artisans as a mark of high honor. The metalworker receives the sheep's tail, the most valuable part of the animal because of its fat. The breast goes to the goldsmith, the thigh to the woodworker, and a rib to the weaver. These four artisans represent the skilled craftsmen who serve the palace and the temple, and treasury tablets from Persepolis document many such payments made during the year to a great variety of workmen. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, temples were always centers of artistic production.

Persepolis Ritual Day 4 begins with the opening ceremonies of the high priest. He rises three and one-half hours before sunrise, washes in river water from the reservoir, and places a linen towel before Ahuramazda and Arta-anaitis. He raises his right hand and recites to the god a prayer reminding him that his proper dwelling is not in the shrine of the goddess, but in Esaggil. He begs Ahuramazda to abandon his exile and turn his face again toward his own temple. The priest withdraws then and offers prayers to Arta-anaitis, extolling her role among the stars, praising her compassion as giver of good luck and health to people, and asking her to assist the needy. This last petition appears to be addressed to her on behalf of both Ahuramazda and the king, for their powers must be restored

and confirmed if civilized life is to continue.

The high priest next goes from Room 9 of Eudul through Door P-2 and enters the Exalted Courtyard, Area 2. He turns north and three times blesses the Temple Esaggil (Room 12), where Ahuramazda normally dwells. He addresses the god as "prince," "the leading star of stars," and "the furrow of heaven" (Allen 1899: 385). By these epithets Ahuramazda is associated with the star Aldebaran and, through it, with the entire zodiac. Aldebaran, in the constellation Taurus, was one of the four guardians of the Persian sky and was associated with the spring equinox. Considered a fortunate star and a portent of riches and honor, it was still called "Star of the Tablet" (a reference to the Tablets of Destiny) long after Taurus had ceased to govern the month of Nisan (Langdon 1935: 69). As "furrow of heaven," Aldebaran, which lies in the moon's path, represents the entire zodiac.

In the late afternoon following the second meal of the day, which probably consisted of the offerings then distributed to the artisans, the high priest covers the front of Anu's tiara and Enlil's statue base, both kept in Ekua, Rooms 16 and 17. These two gods must not hear the recitation which follows. Next the high priest, representing the ancestors from the primal land of Ekua, crosses the Exalted Courtyard and enters Nabu's shrine, Ezida (Rooms 5 and 6), where the copies of the *enuma eliš* are kept. Nabu gives him the seven tablets containing the epic. He takes them across the courtyard to Eudul, raises his right hand, and recites the *enuma eliš* to the god. At Persepolis the ancient poem, which originally reflected Sumerian city worship, has been modified and adapted from Akkadian to Neo-Babylonian and finally to Achaemenid mythology.

Persepolis Ritual Day 5, the critical ritual day, begins at sunset, but it is four hours before sunrise when the eunuch high priest begins his rites. In the early predawn hours he washes in the sacred river water then presents a clean towel before the figurines of the male and female gods, who are together in Eudul. He recites an astrological prayer to Ahuramazda, beginning with "My Lord," continuing

through a list of titles, and concluding with testimony that stars, planets, sun, and moon all manifest the god's power. He addresses a similar prayer to the goddess, emphasizing the feminine aspects of the stars. The heavens and their movements are critical at this moment; while the high priest intones his prayers, the astrologers seek omens in the sky.

At sunrise the temple doors are opened, and the associate priests begin the daily ritual. Two hours after sunrise, when the food trays have been set in place, the exorcist comes with censer, torch, kettledrum, and a jar of sacred water to cleanse the temple area and to purify the building. He performs his ritual in the courtyard, entering neither the shrine of the goddess nor that of Ahuramazda. He does, however, go to Nabu's empty sanctuary, Rooms 4 and 5, to cleanse it of evil intent.

It is in Nabu's sanctuary that the New Year will begin; the exorcist's rites are especially important here. He smears all the doors with cedar resin then mixes aromatics and places them in a silver censer. As part of the exorcism of the sanctuary he calls upon a slaughterer priest to decapitate a ram. Slaughtering the ram in the temple courtyard will propitiate the gods and drive away evil spirits from the sanctuary. Purification completed, both priests leave the area; the exorcist carries with him the body of the ram, and the slaughterer carries its head. Facing west, they throw their portions into the Pulvar River before crossing it and going into open country, where they will stay until conclusion of the ceremonies on Day 12. The high priest, forbidden to view these ceremonies lest he be contaminated by them, has remained in seclusion in Ekua throughout the time of purification.

It is interesting to note here that the exorcist priest drives off evil powers in much the same way that he heals the sick in the normal course of his duties throughout the year. The ritual of exorcism is associated with acts of creation. To exorcise the worm which causes a toothache, one first must recall Anu's acts of creation and Ea's indulgence in allowing the worm to exist (Pritchard 1955: 100-1). Health is restored by the petitioner when he calls upon Ea to smite the worm with his

hand, revoking the original indulgence which is at the root of the pain. The slaughter of a ram in the courtyard of the sufferer propitiates the gods and drives away evil spirits who bring harm and pain.

Three and one-half hours after sunrise the high priest calls for the artisans to bring the Golden Heaven from the god's treasury into Ezida, the shrine of Nabu, where it will be used to cover the altar. The Golden Heaven, depicted in the Hall of 100 Columns as covering the enthroned Xerxes, is supported by four poles. Lustrous with symbols of divine authority, Ahuramazda flies in winged splendor from within the circle of eternity. The Golden Heaven marks the site of active supernatural power, power which will be transferred from Nabu to Ahuramazda and thence to the king. This canopy will again be prominent on Ritual Day 9, when all peoples will see it displayed on the Apadana porch as a feature of the king's enthronement.

Having brought the Golden Heaven, the artisans join the high priest in a loud recital of the prayer which brings the exorcism to an end: "Depart, all evil now in this temple!" The artisans also depart.

Until now Ahuramazda has remained in exile in Eudul, but by the time of the late afternoon meal, he is once again in his own temple, Esaggil, exalted among the gods. The god who had power but relinquished it in the last days of the old year resumes his vigor as the sun moves toward its daily zenith in this first month of the new year. Ahuramazda, sunlike, has been released from the mountain in the east which seeks to restrain him. Persepolis is cut deeply into the mountain Kuh-i-rahmat, which delays sunrise over the city for several hours; the sun must mount 15° above the horizon before its rays first touch the buildings of Persepolis. During this time the god is restored to his position of authority within Esaggil in a ritual which reenacts the myth of his original rise to supremacy.

The high priest plays a central role in this ritual. He may even dress as the god Ahuramazda, for as a eunuch, and so unqualified for kingship, he may ceremonially

. . . the heavens and their movements are critical; while the high priest intones his prayers, the astrologers seek omens in the sky . . .

... Ahuramazda, who relinquishes his power in the last days of the old year, now regains his position in the New Year ritual ...

identify himself with the god without thereby appearing to challenge the right of the king to the throne. More probably, though, the priest simply carries the figurine of Ahuramazda out of Eudul, where the god has been in exile, into the Exalted Courtyard. He passes through Door P-2, which is incised with circles, lions, and the sacred flower, all omens of, and calculations for, the auspicious parallel movement of the king later in the day. Other priests carry figures to represent all the gods in the mythical drama; enough fragments of images have survived from Persepolis to justify an assumption that all the activities of the ritual were enacted by such figures.

The high priest first carries the figure of Ahuramazda into Esaggil, where he exchanges his royal attire for that of a warrior. Then, surrounded by chanting priests, he bears the god back across the courtyard and into Ekua, where Ahuramazda ceremonially slays a lion monster. The god returns to Ezida and slays a griffin before passing through Door P-6, where he slays a bull monster. Perhaps he appears on the steps outside Door P-12 to the crowds assembled on the plain, before returning to the Exalted Courtyard where the battle between the god and the demon concludes. Finally he takes the Tablets of Destiny and moves into Esizkur to receive the acclaim of the gods, who have gathered to welcome the victor with rejoicing.

The battle over, the high priest presents Ahuramazda with an elaborate feast served in dishes made of gold to reflect the brightness of his sunlike countenance. Roast meat, 12 loaves of bread served on a golden tray, golden dishes with salt and honey, and four other dishes of food make up the banquet. The priest places a gold censer before the tray and pours a libation of wine to the god. Ahuramazda is in a state of majesty and power.

With the feast before them, the high priest implores the god to be sympathetic to "whoever seizes your hands" while in Esizkur, "the chamber of destiny" (Pallis 1926: 97). (At Babylon, Esizkur, the god's

sanctuary, was part of Esaggil, yet so closely associated with Ekua as to make its location difficult to pinpoint; at Persepolis, Room 15 perfectly satisfies this ambiguity of location.) When the priest completes his recitation, he summons the artisans and commands them to carry the tray to Nabu, who has arrived in Ezida, his shrine, probably by chariot. Chariots frequently replace boats in Neo-Babylonian city festivals, and 25-cm bronze horses suitable for pulling the chariot of a god figurine have been uncovered at Persepolis (Schmidt 1957: 70).

The king has accompanied Nabu to Ezida. When Nabu has been removed from his chariot, the artisans and the bearded temple priest of the carvings wash the king's hands and lead him to Esaggil, where the high priest meets him. The artisans do not enter Esaggil but leave through the main gate, Door P-3. The king, the high priest, and the bearded priest are alone in Esaggil for the final activities in this series of rites.

The Golden Heaven has been brought from Ezida and raised above the image of Ahuramazda, now enthroned in Esizkur. The high priest removes the symbols of authority—the scepter, the circle, and the sword—from the king and places them before the god while the king remains in Esaggil. Meanwhile the bearded priest assists by caring for the censer. Now the high priest, having returned to the king, strikes him on the cheek, then removes his crown and places it before the god. Finally, as utter abasement, the high priest drags the king by his ears before the god as a captive before his conqueror, a subject before his suzerain. The king humbles himself before the god.

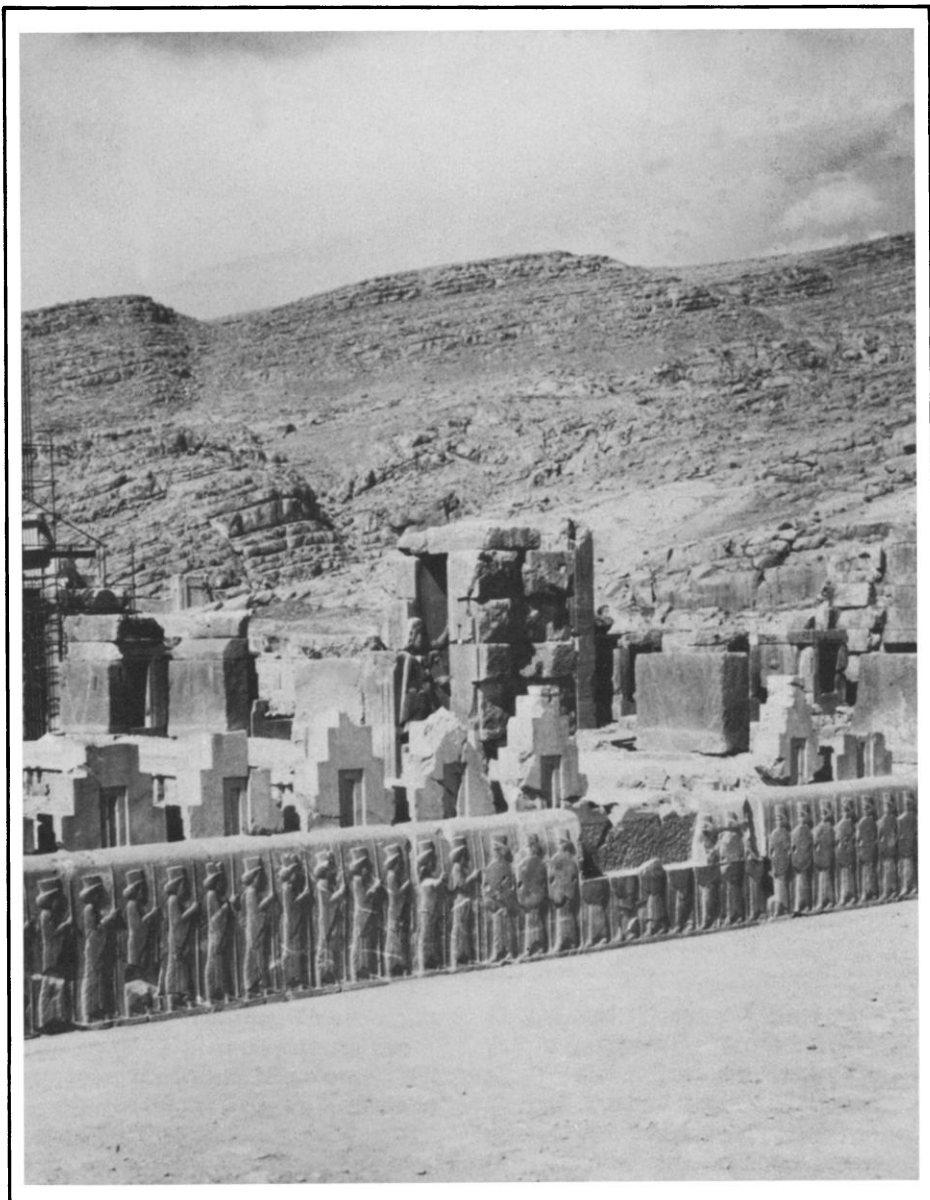
The annual ritual humiliation of the king restates royal authority over society. The fertile crescent had been integrated into a workable hegemony by the Assyrians and the Neo-Babylonians by massive military force and propagation of a form of the common Mesopotamian myth. The Neo-Babylonian empire finally collapsed when it sought to alter the myth and demanded the uniformity

Relief showing procession in honor of the Persian king. Photo by Steven Sidebotham.

of all local practices. Such a demand created widespread hostility against the king and the central priesthood. Cyrus recognized that a program of religious toleration within the confines of the accepted myth would give him greater control over his subjects with less need for military domination. Darius' personal religious beliefs were irrelevant; he used the Persepolis festival to confirm Achaemenid sovereignty by manifesting the king's willingness to accept the cosmology of the subject peoples.

Participation in the New Year's ritual also made Darius more acceptable to the priests of the nations his government now administered. The Achaemenids sought the support of the priesthood in every conquered country, knowing that the priest and temple controlled the wealth, property, and people in their area. Through the destruction of the local kings the Achaemenids became the patrons of the regional shrines in alliance with the native priesthood, so creating a supranational state. In Egypt, for example, Darius appeared as an Egyptian, built Egyptian temples, and maintained a policy of local tolerance, all in order to demonstrate his recognition of the power and authority of the ancient temples. In return, the Egyptians needed only to participate in the New Year's Festival at Persepolis to demonstrate loyalty to the crown; meanwhile they could maintain their own identity and integrity and preserve their own complex socio-economic structure as reflected in their religious system. This pattern held true for all the satrap peoples. The humiliation of a king at Persepolis was a step toward the assumption of total power. Control of what was then the entire civilized world was surely worth a slap in the face.

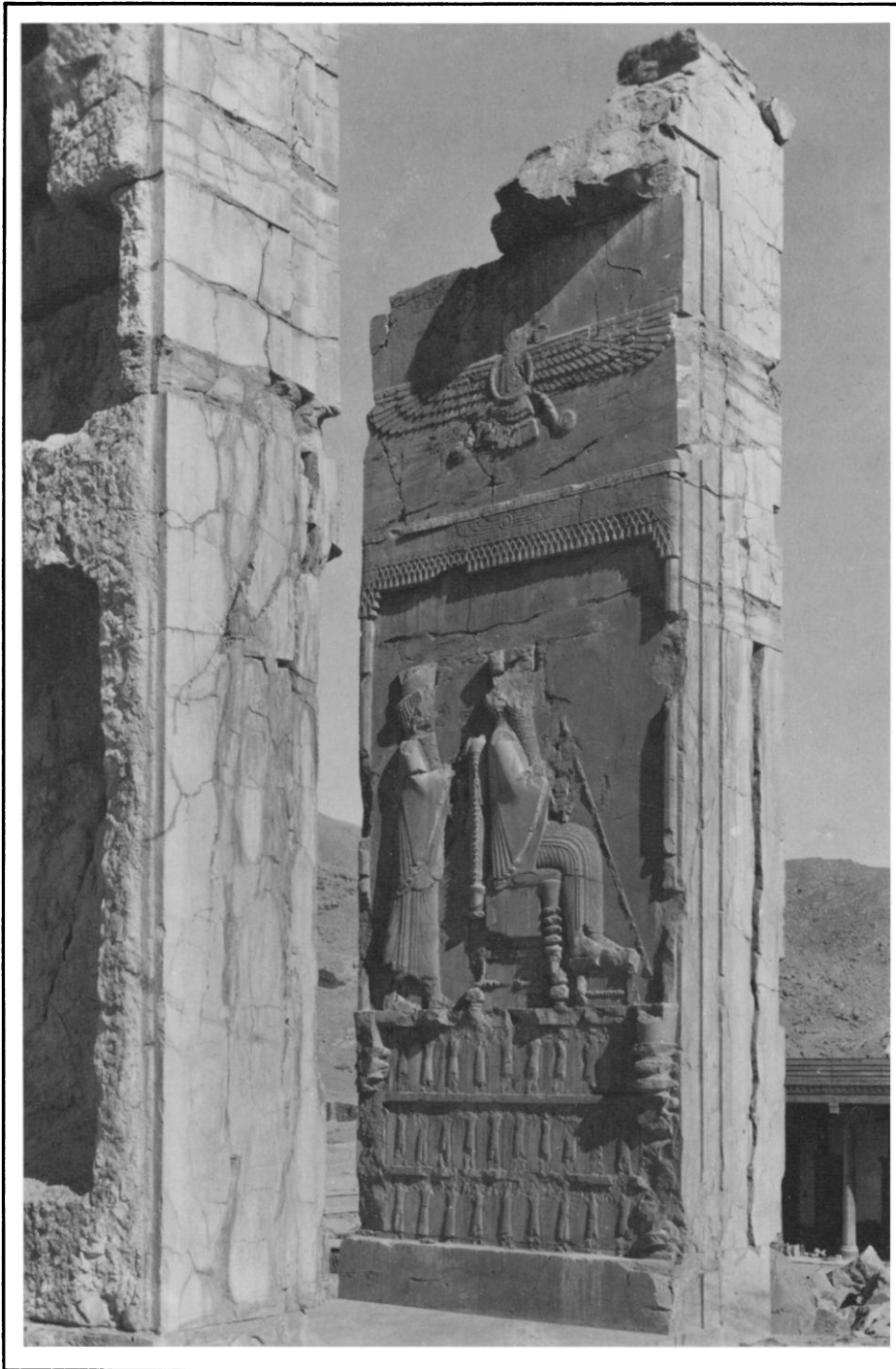
But Darius had to build a new site for the religious portion of his international program; none of the old capital cities of the Persian empire would do for what he intended, none was meaningful and acceptable as a



setting for the Mesopotamian ritual drama both to subject nations and to the Persians. Susa was not a genuine part of the Achaemenid homeland, and Ecbatana was Median. Even Pasargadae, site of Cyrus' capital, was reserved for the coronation of the native dynasty, and here the provincial rites of the Persians were performed. These may have been the observances known by Herodotus (484-424 B.C.). Pasargadae, then, had to be abandoned and Persepolis built, because Pasargadae could not serve as a platform for an international enthronement on the Mesopotamian pattern. Indeed, the new city of Persepolis was the natural outgrowth of the unique policy of toleration begun by Cyrus and

Cambyzes. The Achaemenids were to rule as local native princes in every nation under their dominion. The humiliation of the king before the high priest was an essential piece of Persian hegemony.

The king, now divested of his symbols of authority, kneels before the god and proclaims his loyalty to the religious establishment which represents the order upon which society is built. He proclaims that he has not broken the essential commandments; in effect, he pledges to support the existing political temple structures. The colossal expenditure of time and money necessary for the maintenance of the Persepolis ritual could not be justified unless it reconciled the two



Darius enthroned, with Xerxes. Beneath are the throne-bearers, and above is the symbol of Ahuramazda. East door, south jamb in the Main Hall of the Council Hall. *OIP* 68, pl. 78A; courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago.

good will come in the new year. The king now pays homage to the gods assembled in the inner shrine of Esizkur while the bearded priest burns incense. It is now sunset, and a new day is about to begin. "Forty reeds, each three cubits long" are placed in a hole in the Exalted Courtyard; honey, cream, and oil are poured over them. A white bull is made ready for sacrifice. The king ignites the bundle of reeds, sending into the sky a flare of light which informs the multitude which waits on the plain below of the reconstitution of the social order, and invites the people's preparation for their part in the events to follow.

Persepolis Ritual Day 6 begins with the flames rising from the burning reeds. The daily evening ritual is performed. Before dawn the high priest, in the shrine, performs those rituals which will give efficacy to the daylight actions. The late morning meal marks the end of the special meat-offerings made to Ahuramazda since Day 3. Not until late morning is the purified king ready to perform the ancient ritual slaying of the demons. He has gained the right to do this through his participation in the first five days of the drama: he has been made godlike; he may perform the duties of the god-hero. Although the priests assist him in the proper enactment of the ritual, the king has now become an active figure. His days of dependency and passivity are over.

The king enters Esaggil and lays down his royal regalia, exchanging his long robe for a special short robe designed for combat. He carries in his hand a short ceremonial gold sword like one uncovered at Ziwiye and numerous others now in world museums (Beeson 1972: 51). The high priest places a low crown on the king's head, and the king leaves Esaggil and goes to Ekua, passing through Door P-4. Here he exorcises the demons of the past as did the god on Ritual Day 5. First he slays a lion-monster, then he enters Room 17, the inner shrine of

primary power blocks of ancient society, royalty and the priesthood.

"Have no fear," the high priest admonishes the suppliant king, "The god will listen to your prayer. He will exalt your kingship" (Pritchard 1955: 334a). He instructs the king that henceforth on the festival of the first day of each month and at the celebration of the Opening of the Gate he must perform the rites of the purification of hands at both night and

day services. The high priest assures the king of the god's favor; priestly economic, political, and social support are guaranteed to the king by his pledge to protect temple property and privilege. Now the god seizes the king's hands. The king stands once again and is reinvested with the symbols of his authority. In full regalia the king is struck a second time across the cheek by the priest; tears brought to the king's eyes by the blow assure that

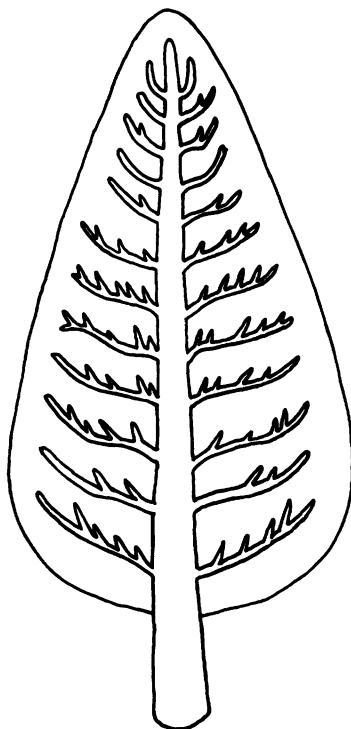
Anu and Enlil. There he shows himself to them in his prowess, as one who, barehanded, has slain a lion-cub. Next he crosses the Exalted Courtyard and, through Door P-5, enters the shrine of Nabu. There he vanquishes the scorpion-tailed griffin. Standing before the inner shrine of Ezida, he now vaunts himself before Nabu as one able to slay a lion barehanded. Finally, he returns to the Exalted Courtyard and passes into the vestibule, Room 6, where he slays the bull-demon, symbol of the formerly rebellious but now submissive leaders of the world. At last he appears on the steps outside Door P-12 to show forth his power a third time, this time to the international masses who, in awe of his mighty acts, admire the fierce warrior.

Having three times defeated demons and made his victories known, the king returns to the Exalted Courtyard. Priests assist him, chanting spells to keep his mind from confusion. Now the king decapitates the two images constructed on Ritual Day 3. Tiamat and Kingu have fallen. The king enters Esaggil and takes the Tablets of Destiny, which have been in the god's possession in Esizkur. He places them around his neck. He resumes his full royal regalia: high crown, staff, long robe, bracelets, and a flower talisman to ward off any residue of evil. Marduk carries this same plant in the *enuma eliš*. The king is proclaimed victorious; he leads a processional from Esaggil into the courtyard.

The bearded priest puts away his censer and incense pail. With empty, crossed hands he follows the high priest, who holds a bull whisk over the king's head with his right hand and carries the sacred towel folded over his left wrist. In the Exalted Courtyard the bearded priest picks up a ceremonial seven-branched umbrella, the type used to shade the divinities in the processional and, with its branches representing the five planets, the moon, and the sun, a more portable form of the Golden Heaven. He holds the umbrella over the high priest and the king as they all three move onto the porch and into the astrological gardens en route to the residential quarters. Xerxes and Artaxerxes perform the same rituals as described for Darius' *tachara*, but move through the rooms

of their own *hadish* before returning to the residential palace.

Persepolis Ritual Day 7 is creation day. The daily opening ritual is performed according to the pattern established on the first six days of the festival. Then, in predawn ceremonies, the high priest and his constant companion (the bearded priest) reenact the events of primal creation. They place the assembled gods on new stands within the Exalted Courtyard. The gods are clustered in their natural constellations, those heavenly reflections of the macrocosm of the divine order. Thirty-six stars, each a god, are similar to the decan of Egyptian astrology (36 x 10 days equals 360) (Foucart 1910: 100a, b). The priests set the gods in careful order to ensure the proper working of night and day, times and seasons. Having determined the course of the stars, the priests pour out ablutions to create, through homeopathic magic, rain, rivers, and underground waterways. From the carcass of Tiamat, mountains rise. Chapels are erected to serve the needs of the gods. All is possible because the Tablets of Destiny have been recovered from the people of the Lie. Order results from the proper investiture of power.



The king and his entourage arrive in the daylight to participate in the royal part of the ritual, after the first meal of the morning. The king, by his possession of the Tablets of Destiny given to him by Ahuramazda, is able to establish the laws of the empire. These immutable decrees of the Medes and the Persians are like the stars, which brightly manifest cosmic order and permanence. The rulers of the microcosm inscribe their law in stone, and thereby carve unceasing order into the hearts and minds of men. Out of chaos and rebellion the king, with the aid of Ahuramazda, has brought order. The god has made him king, and by the favor of the god the people are his subjects.

The Behistun inscription exemplifies the purpose of creation day in the ritual at Persepolis:

Saith Darius the King: The kingdom which had been taken away from our family, that I put in its place; I re-established it on its foundation. As before, so I made the sanctuaries which Gaumata the Magian destroyed. I restored to the people the pastures and the herds, the household slaves and the horses which Gaumata the Magian took away from them. I re-established the people on its foundation, both Persia and Media and the other provinces. As before, so I brought back what had been taken away. By the favor of Ahuramazda this I did: I strove until I re-established our royal house on its foundation as before. So I strove, by the favor of Ahuramazda, so that Gaumata the Magian did not remove our royal house. Darius, *Behistun* I, 1: 61-71 (Kent 1953: 120).

According to the Mesopotamian mythology, monarchs by nature and divine blessing create order and build shrines. Creation day rites, including the casting of Second Destinies and perhaps the Sacred Marriage, take place in the palace of the reigning monarch, for on creation day the king must give evidence of his powers of order and creation by performing his rites within a building of his own construction. Each king acts as a godlike creator, presiding over the ordered world, mankind, and the fertility of the land. Darius founded Persepolis in part to fulfill his role as creator and builder, and Xerxes and Artaxerxes I expanded the cere-

The hero's combat with a horned, lion-headed monster. North jamb, south doorway, west wall of the Main Hall of the Palace of Darius. *OIP* 68, pl. 145B; courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago.

monial city partly out of the same understanding of the meaning of kingship. These two heirs of Darius understood and obeyed the ritual demand that each also build a *hadish* as part of his sacred role, as a self-definition and confirmation of divine blessing.

The *hadishes* of Xerxes and Artaxerxes I are to the south of the *tachara*. Both buildings face its courts, are lower in elevation, and reflect similar ritual functions. In both buildings the shrine areas of Eudul and Esaggil have been omitted, indicating that their function was not identical to that of the sacred temple. So too, both of these buildings lack any sign of mortised slots like those of the three processional doors in the Darius *tachara*.

Foundation plaques identify the *hadishes* of Xerxes and Artaxerxes I; on each the king reiterates the words of Darius inscribed at Behistun. Each king beseeches Ahuramazda and the other gods to take notice of his words and to grant protection and favor to his reign. The primary plaque for Persepolis, however, lies at bedrock at the southwest corner of the platform, placed there by Darius.

Ritually obligated to be a builder of temples and shrines, the king annually added to or elaborated each building. This unceasing change in the old structures, plus the need for continuous building of new ones, gives Persepolis its curious appearance of being both finished and unfinished at the same time. The oldest buildings have sections in a rough stage of carving, allowing for additional work to be performed each year. If the site ever achieved completion the dynasty would end. The myth, then, encouraged upkeep and maintenance and, incidentally, automatically enrolled the king as supporter of the priesthood and its organization. "What had been built by my father," Xerxes writes, "that I protected and other buildings I added. What moreover I built, and

what my father built, all that by favor of Ahuramazda we built."

However, the building program of later kings, especially that of Artaxerxes III, who built a palace on the site of the astrological gardens, reveals a different understanding of the function of Persepolis and of the role of the king. Their structures, therefore, contribute nothing to understanding the New Year's festival at Persepolis or the ceremonial definition and role of the Achaemenid king. In fact, during the early years of Artaxerxes I, when it was no longer necessary to sight the new moon for the establishment of the annual calendar, the importance of Persepolis diminished rapidly; it became merely the burial ground of late kings and the home of a recluse ruler.

Persepolis Ritual Day 8 celebrates the casting of the First Destinies, the result of the victory of the god over the Lie. The evening ritual starts the day, but it is in the predawn hours that the primary mythological rites are performed. The high priest begins the ritual in Darius' *tachara*. With the assistance of the priesthood the gods assemble to give homage to Ahuramazda, who is exalted over other gods because of his victory over the evil demon, Tiamat. The gods convene to build him a temple. In Esizkur, the chamber of destinies, they hail the victorious hero. This divine accolade will echo later in the day in honor of the king. Opposite Esizkur, in the plain mirroring the holy place, the assembled nations wait. The high priest bears the god from Esizkur to the shrine of Anu and Enlil. Here, among primal origins, Ahuramazda reestablishes sacred priorities, partitioning the cosmos into its preordained divisions and allotting to the gods their respective functions and sanctuaries. The traditional fabric of society is restored. Anu and Enlil bow and kiss the feet of the hero Ahuramazda, proclaiming, "This is the king."

The god now sits on his throne seat and announces that he will establish a place on earth for the assembly of the gods, a place where their shrines will be given daily care,



forever served by the chastened rebellious ones and by mankind. Indeed, silent carved figures of priests at Persepolis still carry offerings aloft to the platform in fulfillment of that pledge. The gods honor the hero and call him “king of the gods of sky and earth.”

In the forenoon the king arrives to celebrate the First Destinies. He is accompanied by members of his entourage who comprise the hub of his government. In the *tachara* they pledge fealty to their lord. The victorious king appears to the subject world on the porch outside Door P-6 while his entourage returns to the Exalted Courtyard. Here the king announces the reestablishment of the empire according to the preordained divisions of nobles, priesthood, army, and subject Medes and Persians. These forces protect the nation and provide prosperity. In lines 12-24 of his inscription at Persepolis we find Darius’ invocation to the god (Kent 1953: 136):

Saith Darius the king: May Ahuramazda bear me aid, with the gods of the royal house; and may Ahuramazda protect this country from famine, from the Lie! Upon this country may there not come an army, nor famine, nor the Lie; this I pray as a boon from Ahuramazda together with the gods of the royal house. This boon may Ahuramazda together with the gods of the royal house give to me!

The processional moves onward from the *tachara* through the astrological gardens into the subordinate buildings. In fact, Xerxes and Artaxerxes perform this part of the festival ritual in the buildings of their own construction, though Artaxerxes may pass through the building of his father en route to his own structure. Such passage would manifest the continuity of the dynasty and ritually repeat the familiar genealogy of the inscriptions.

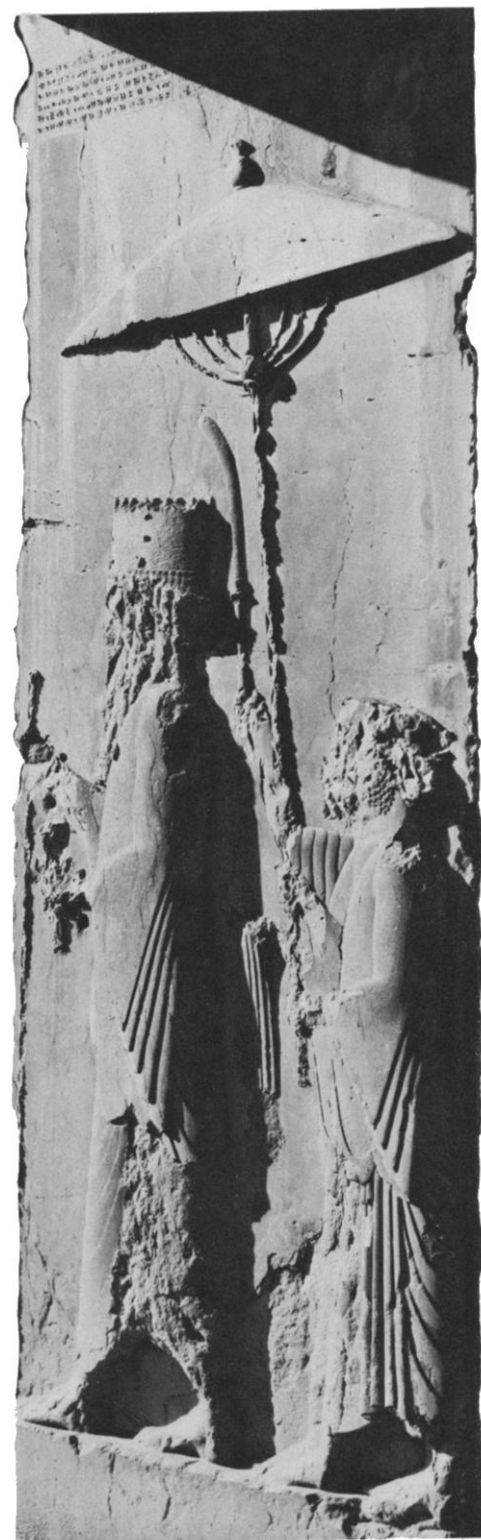
Incisions mark the doors through which the king and priests move, the processional doors of the city. Lions, circles, and palmettes—three types of omen markings—are predominantly found carved into the figure of the king but are also to be seen on doorways in the *tachara*, in the *hadish* of Xerxes

The king and two attendants. West jamb, south doorway of the Main Hall of the Palace of Darius. *OIP* 68, pl. 139B; courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago.

and Artaxerxes I, and in the Tripylon. The lion and the circle are associated with the equinox and solstice activities at Persepolis. A “sketching stone” uncovered in the detritus south of the platform by G. Tilia contains a number of such lions and circles. On this stone two of the lions are tangential to one of the circles and are crossed by a line at an angle of 23.5° , the angle of the sun’s excursion from the equinox. The seven-petaled ritual flower—another omen incised on doorways at Persepolis—suggests the plant carried by the king to ward off evil and poison on the sixth ritual day. Many nobles bear it in the grand procession. Incisions other than the three types of omens mark the doorways and convey additional kinds of information; the name of Xerxes cut into the robe of Darius in a processional doorway gives evidence that he used the *tachara*, as do his repairs and new construction on the building.

Persepolis Ritual Day 9 begins in the *tachara* at sunset. This is the day of processional and enthronement. With the assistance of the priesthood the gods of the royal household assemble in the early predawn. They denounce rebellion and pledge loyalty to Ahuramazda. Representatives of shrines throughout the home countries, and loyal members of Ahuramazda’s hegemony, they oppose the Lie, which represents an alternate world view and a system of religious authority and power contrary to that of the ruling priesthood and of Darius, the monarch.

The gods, with their shrines, property, authority, wealth, priests, and economic community, have much at stake in the establishment and preservation of this particular world order. Rebellion and the Lie are attributed to Tiamat and Kingu, who represent powers dangerous to the altars of the faithful gods. Those men who supported Bardiya-Gaumata are like the disciples of Tiamat, who steal the Tablets of Destiny and seek to



... the gods of the royal household assemble in the predawn. They denounce rebellion and pledge loyalty to Ahuramazda ...

construct a society according to their own desires. After defeating Bardiya-Gaumata, Darius rebuilt the altars of the gods who had been dispossessed. All the gods of the hegemony rejoice now at Ahuramazda's victory, as they did at that of Darius.

Ahuramazda originally created the earth from Tiamat's body; now, from the blood of Kingu, from whom he has taken the Tablets of Destiny, Ahuramazda brings mankind into being to provide for the needs of the gods. The lands, wealth, and prosperity of the hostile gods and of their shrines have been transferred to the control of the loyal gods. Joyful in Ahuramazda's victory, the gods march in the predawn from the *tachara* to the Tripylon and thence to the Apadana.

The Apadana, which lies immediately north of the *tachara*, is ritually an extension of Esizkur. This large, columned hall has three porches on its west, north, and east sides. The west porch looks out over the plain, and the north one faces the north courtyard, which lies immediately inside the Gate of All Peoples. A double reversing stairway, decorated with Medes and Persians, leads to the north porch. Up these stairs the nobility of the two home nations climb after mounting to the platform, passing through the Gate of All Peoples, and crossing the north courtyard. Two anterooms off the north porch reflect the balance and symmetry of the Medes and Persians, a balance as carefully preserved as the symmetry between heaven and earth, night and day, sun and moon. The priests bring Ahuramazda and the royal gods to this entrance of the Apadana. They carry Ahuramazda on his throne stand and place him in the center of the building upon a small dais. This new enthronement of the god symbolizes his victory over Tiamat.

The staircases to the eastern porch of the Apadana are the most renowned of the building. Carvings on them depict the processional of the 27 tribute-bearing nations. Led by Medes and Persians, they come to participate in the enthronement of the king. In the predawn hours, the mirror of reality points to the heavens, to the

assembling of the gods, precursors of the peoples. The priests of the satrap nations approach the grand staircase that lifts them from the plain to the platform. They carry their national gods and enter the Apadana by the east staircase.

Ahuramazda now sets the laws for the gods and establishes 600 gods on the earth. He appoints each loyal local god as chief over his own home shrine and assures the god of his support for the upkeep of his temple. Throughout the empire, local gods are made secure and supreme in their own territory. Ahuramazda, seated in his glory, watches as the priest gives to all the gods permission to build private shrines. One example of such a private shrine built with the permission of Ahuramazda is the temple built in Jerusalem and dedicated to YHWH during the reign of Darius. Ahuramazda will honor and support the many local gods and will not interfere in their cults. This integration of the local cults into the imperial religion and myth is a key innovation of the Persian hegemony.

The royal procession begins after sunrise. The king with his royal household goes from the *tachara* to the Tripylon. There he mounts a portable throne constructed in the form of a footstool. This footstool symbolizes the earth, upon which Ahuramazda rests his feet; Persepolis bears the feet of the god. The representatives of the 27 tributary nations carried this footstool, the king's throne, to the Tripylon. The king is now carried to the Apadana, where his throne is placed on the same dais used by Ahuramazda earlier in the morning. Medes and Persians enter the Apadana from the north and acclaim the king as victor and organizer of the empire. He has defeated the Lie and put down all rebellion, he has established orderly rule over the inhabited world.

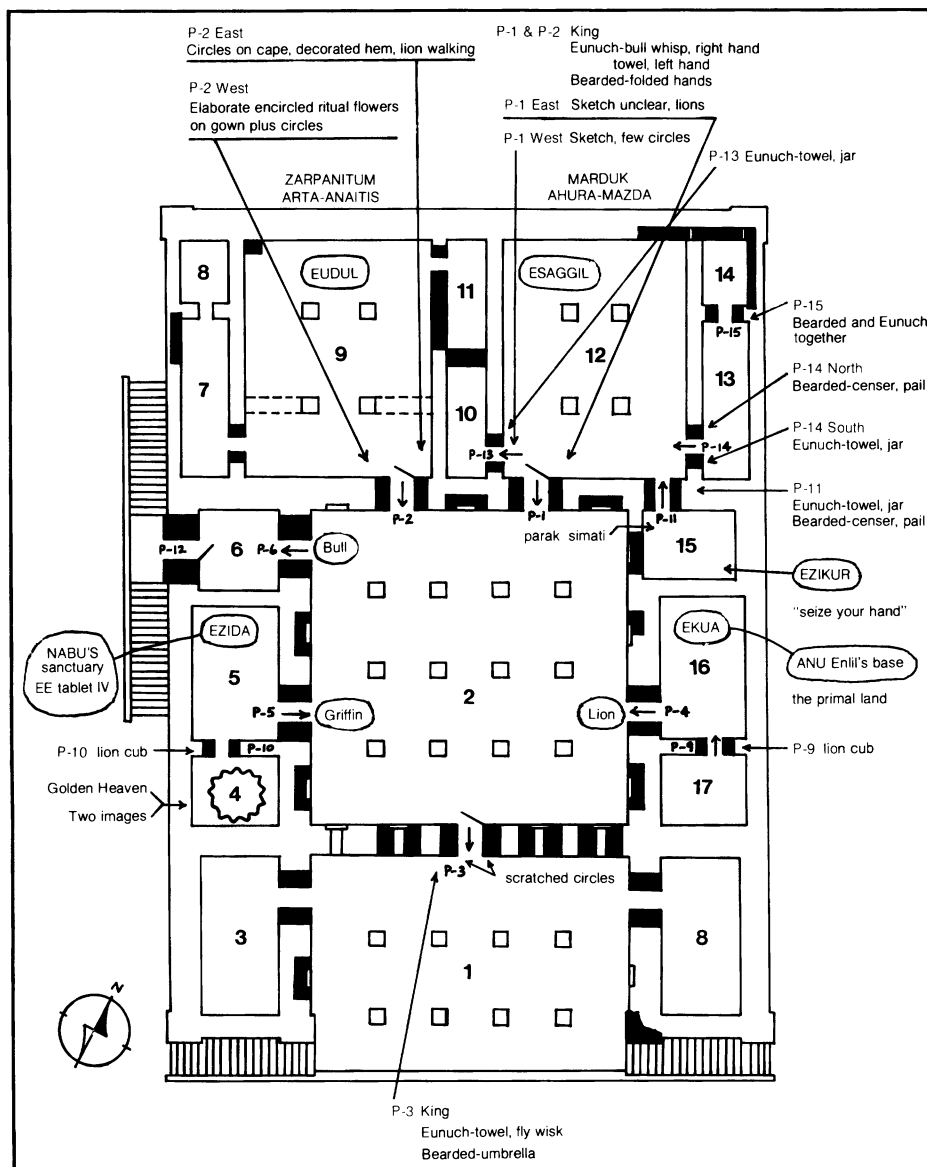
Slowly the priests and nobles of the 27 subject nations mount the 111 steps of the grand staircase. They pass through the Gate of All Peoples and continue toward the mountain before turning south to enter the east courtyard of the Apadana. Each delegation of subject people is led by a Mede or a Persian. First to enter from the east stairway are 43 Persians without hats. They are followed by

The temple of Persepolis, Darius' *tachara*.
The names of the areas are supplied from the Babylonian ritual and the *enuma eliš*, since the Persian designations are unknown.

three bearded Medes, each carrying a carpet under his left arm and a whip in the right. A fourth Mede, also with whip and carpet, bears a large footstool on his back, while a fifth man helps him with his burden. Three riderless horses with attendants follow. Another hatless Persian comes in front of the two teams of horse-drawn chariots with drivers. All the pictured objects are gifts, intended for the enthronement and acclamation of the king. Those bringing carpets will spread them in front of the king and kneel, placing their whips before him in recognition of his authority to discipline and to chastise after the manner of Ahuramazda. The footstool continues the imagery of the king's dominion over the earth. The young horses are gifts for his stables. The chariots of the gods become the chariots of the king.

More Medes and Persians follow. These come in casual procession, carrying flowers and bells, chatting and visiting. Finally the tribute nations enter the Apadana. Each nation is privileged to participate in the ritual enthronement of the king. Persepolis is a syncretism of style, a composite whole reconciled by the master plan of the Achaemenid monarch. The Apadana depiction of the tribute of the nations epitomizes this reconciliation of disparity into unity; the 27 representatives display both individuality and conformity. Though all look alike, each wears unique and representative clothing. They come carrying spears, cloth, bracelets, trousers, jars of oil, shields, and small animals, all for the ritual enthronement of the king. All come from their own nations to contribute to one king who rules over one empire. They bring the foods, oils, costumes, and other articles necessary for a religious service in which the king has become the recipient of the offerings.

The throne of the king is transported to the west porch of the Apadana. In the light of early evening, seated on his throne, the king may be viewed from the plain below by the

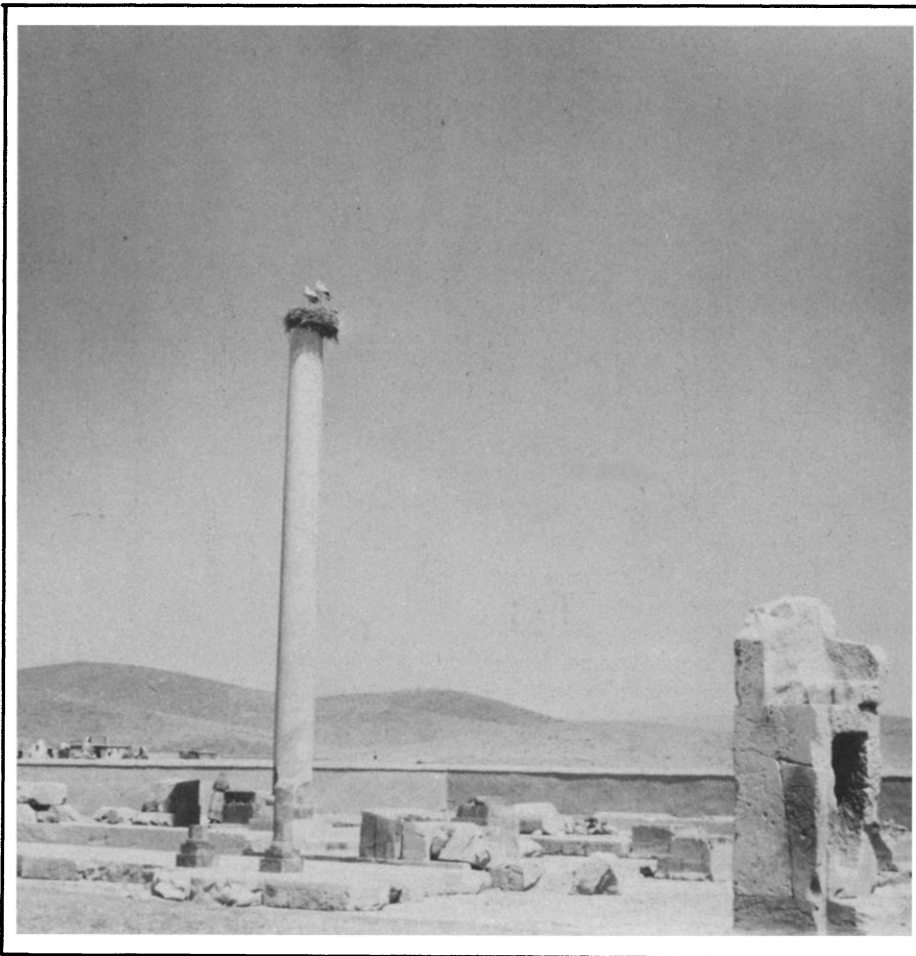


assembled host. Over his head rises the canopy of the Golden Heaven, supported by four poles at the corners of the huge footstool. His loyal subjects surround him.

Persepolis Ritual Day 10 is the day of the banquet and the celebration of the sacred marriage. Once again the gods assemble before dawn, but this time they come for a feast; they will celebrate and take pleasure in the sipping of festal beer. Needless to say, beermakers figure in the Treasury inscriptions. The feast binds the gods together in oriental hospitality; they eat salt together. The 50 gods of the royal household participate in this grand banquet, while the 600 gods of the earth attend a separate feast. Even Ahuramazda's universality, however, is

not so generous as to allow him to eat with the gods of the subject nations.

The banquet echoes the rites of homeopathic magic of the seventh day. Serving large amounts of food to the gods at New Year ensures a good harvest in the year to come; the banquet consists of great quantities of food carried to the gods by the servant priests, thereby providing for the maintenance and preservation of national prosperity. After the banquet, the priests receive the food cooked for the gods. Grain offerings to the gods at harvest time reflect even more exactly the gods' role in future prosperity. Grain offered to the gods provides the seed for the next planting. Before the feast ends, the seven gods of the sun, moon,



The remains of Persepolis. Photo by Steven Sidebotham.

and five planets decide destiny for the coming year.

Next comes the celestial celebration of the sacred marriage. In the sky the god Enlil lifts Ahuramazda's bow, kisses it, and calls it his daughter. The bow-star is Sirius, known to the Persians as Tishtrya (Allen 1899: 122). It rises in the south-southeast; its light shines into the open windows of the *tachara*. Arta-anaitis is associated with this star. The power of Tishtrya combined with that of Ahuramazda assures continued fertility. The ceremony of the sacred marriage concludes, then, with Ahuramazda leaving the banquet and going to the Tripylon. There, bull-like, he fertilizes the earth so that the new growing season may begin. The homeopathic magic of the feast and the symbolic marriage of the gods with its assurance of fertility to follow comes to an end with this act.

So goes the myth for this day. In the sacred drama, the banquet for the king, like that for the god, celebrates his victory over the chaos demons. At

the close of the feast the king goes to the Tripylon to celebrate the consummation of the sacred marriage.

Only the Medes and the Persians attend the king's feast, like their divine counterparts. Later, however, Xerxes will build a Hall of 100 Columns so that the subject peoples may also feast, though in a separate building. Additionally, Xerxes will build a wall around the eastern court of the Apadana. In this later time the king's throne seat will be brought to the Hall of 100 Columns by the 27 bearers, for the throne, which looks like a great footstool, is fully portable.

Persepolis Ritual Day 11 is the final day of the spring festival, though another festival will be held in September to coincide with the autumnal equinox. Ceremonies different from those in the New Year's festival were held for the winter and summer solstice. Only in the spring was the king's presence essential. On this 11th day of the New Year's festival, the Second Destinies are cast; the king announces the year's appointments

and honors. One aspect of the day of Second Destinies may be preserved in the Apadana's original principal carving, the scene of the Mede standing before Darius and his son Xerxes, found in the "treasury" building. Here the Mede honors the king and his son in the presence of the high priest and the commander of the army. The bearded priest, holding his incense pail and censer, stands beside a soldier. The Mede performs an act of worship before the king, and the king accepts the homage given to the god during the performance of divine ritual. The king has presumably just announced his promotions and honors to the priesthood, army, and royal household. The people of the world are commanded to obey these new officers of the empire.

Persepolis Ritual Day 12 sees the gods return to their shrines. When Nabu has been restored to his proper place, life picks up its normal pace. The exorcist and slaughterer priests return to the city. The priesthood begins to prepare for the next set of rituals, the celebration of Nabu's own story, which begins at the next new moon. The king and his entourage prepare for their journey to the summer capital, Hamadan. The king dispatches messages and instructions with the returning delegations to the farthest corners of the empire. Persepolis quickens with change, with new life. The recurring drama which tells the same story from year to year engenders new life, new growth, new creation. The ceremonial city remains alive, for it is the ritual heart of the empire, focus and source of the social contract upon which order is built.

Persepolis: the Mirror of Reality

Darius' *tachara* at Persepolis has been called the Hall of Mirrors because its carvings, arranged in pairs, reflect one another. These mirror images, however, are an insignificant part of the true mirror, Persepolis itself. Darius built this shrine to reflect truth

itself as it was known to the Achemenids. Sacred reality, the realm of the absolute source of value, was there made physically comprehensible so that king, priesthood, army, and people might be able to approach the eternal through ritual. Persepolis is a model, an instrument by which the forces of society reconstitute themselves, the microcosm, in harmony with universal order, the macrocosm. Persepolis is a reflection of the garden of perfect origins, a physical copy of the form and order inherent in the universe. It is a manifestation of the sacred dream and a reflection of the essence of the stars. Men perform ritual within this perfect model so as to absorb truth and acquire the knowledge necessary for the control of physical reality. If social structures can be built and maintained in harmony with eternal truth, they will endure.

Ahuramazda stands at the apex of the spiritual realm. He is creator by virtue of slaying Tiamat, the demon of chaos, and capturing the Tablets of Destiny. As victor he determines priorities in the First Destinies and establishes law. Ahuramazda exists in the true world of spirit, which men may comprehend through ritual drama. There he is surrounded by the gods, who call upon him for leadership, succor, and safety, for although they support him in battle, he is the primary agent of victory. He rules over the gods as one who knows primal origins and has formed chaos into order, and he assigns to each god a specific function. Ahuramazda combines force with reason in his rule of the gods; he dominates the irrational powers either by conquering them, as he does Tiamat and Kingu, or by training them to work in harmony, as he does the national gods.

Ahuramazda lives not only in the spirit realm, in the predawn hours; he dwells and acts equally in the physical world, in day. In fact, through sunlight he makes himself known to the world of men. His action in the daylight makes the physical world a reality and gives it purpose. Here Ahuramazda, reasonable and tolerant, supports the 600 gods of the earth by allowing them to build independent shrines.

The carvings and the site plan of Persepolis were intended to reflect the reality of the spiritual realm, and the New Year's ritual has been reconstructed here with the help of that reflection. The *Babylonian Temple Program*, the *enuma eliš*, the Treasury tablets, foundation texts, inscriptions, and recovered artifacts have also contributed to the perception and understanding of the divine truth which Persepolis reflects, the reality which it approximates. Persepolis is a model, a copy of the eternal form which manifests itself in all aspects of Achemenid life.

Like Ahuramazda, the king stands at the apex of his realm, the physical world of the Achemenids. By virtue of homeopathic magic and in conjunction with the priesthood, he creates in the microcosm the order and priorities of the macrocosm. As Ahuramazda is surrounded by gods, so the king is encircled by his army, which supports him in battle but constantly demands succor. At Persepolis the government exists in the daylight, for it is a material approximation of the predawn spiritual reality. The priest acts as intermediary between the realm of the gods (the predawn period) and the reality of the state (the sunlit hours). Persepolis as a sacred space exists in both sunlight and moonlight.

Again like Ahuramazda, the king rules over the subject nations through a combination of might and reason. He allies himself with a multitude of national gods to ensure his rule over the entire world. He subdues rebellious nations by force; he trains submissive peoples to work in harmony with his will.

The mirrors of Persepolis reflect the order and sacred ritual of the heavens above, the pattern for political action and practical life on earth. The Apadana stairway carvings tell the tale. All the men seen there ascending to the king look alike, but each wears unique and representative clothing. Their faces show no individuality, for men are servants of the state, distinguishable only by group. A Mede or a Persian leads each delegation into the Apadana, for as representatives of

. . . at Persepolis reality was made physically comprehensible, so that the king, priesthood, army, and people might approach the eternal through ritual . . .

the ruling people they understand the reality of the universe and are able to guide the less knowing to the enthronement of the king. The Medes and the Persians are the knowledgeable ones, children of the sunlight, who lead willing subjects into orderly living. The subject people, in turn, are happy to be guided and illuminated by the Achemenids, for their order is based on the true nature of the universe. When it becomes known, it reveals a self-authenticating truth which was always known in the heart and is now accepted with joy. This is the message of the Persians, this is their self-understanding and their mission.

The ancient Sumerian myth, transmitted by the Babylonians, revised by Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian priests and kings, and depicted through Egyptian forms, Greek carvings, and oriental animals, lives forever at Persepolis. Here Persia's 27 tributary nations stand in silent, harmonious acclamation of the king. The ceremonial city of Darius preserves a complex ideal of order and value. It is a physical approximation, a concrete image, of a philosophy of life expressed in buildings, king, priesthood, army, and subject nations. It is also, when stripped of these characteristics which locate it in space and time, a precursor of a system of thought made popular by a contemporary of Artaxerxes II. Have we by chance discovered Plato's father at Persepolis?

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